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THE BAYOU BRAVO; or, The Terrible Trail.

BY MAJOR SAM S. HALL—"Buckskin Sam,"

AUTHOR OF "DIAMOND DICK," "THE LONE STAR GAMBLER," "THE TERRIBLE TONKAWAY," "KIT CARSON, JR.," "BIG FOOT WALLACE," ETC



"THE NEXT MOMENT, WITH A SHRIEK OF HORROR, THE WRETCH WAS LAUNCHED OUT INTO THE STREAM."

The Bayou Bravo;

OR,

THE TERRIBLE TRAIL.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM,"

(MAJOR SAM. S. HALL.)

AUTHOR OF "DOUBLE DAN," "THE ROUGH RIDERS," "MERCILESS MART," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MUTUAL FRIENDS.

"CAN you work the game as I have planned it?"

"It is no easy matter, Mr. Black, for, you see, this Major Lindsay is a very influential man."

"Dolph Drake, there is bigger money in this game than you'll ever have a chance to play for again with any show for success; and there is not one-half the risk you imagine. You seem doubtful of the result, and rather backward about taking up my liberal offer. Do me the favor to refuse point-blank, or say at once that you will fall in with my proposal."

The speakers were seated over a bottle of wine in an elegantly-furnished apartment, the place being an aristocratic boarding-house in Galveston, Texas, and not far from the Island City Hotel.

The man, with whose words our chapter opens, was young and fashionably attired. A glance at his face, however, would have convinced any one who was at all gifted in the art of reading character by the physiognomy that he was an unprincipled rascal; one who would hesitate at nothing, even crime, to carry out any selfish purpose.

His eyes were black, snaky, and continually wandering here and there in a guilty manner; and not once did he look into the face of the man with whom he was conversing.

His frame was somewhat slight, and he was thin in flesh; and his skin was of a swarthy hue, in keeping with his eyes and hair. His face was clean shaven. He was about five feet, seven inches in height, and at a glance one would know that he was not only quick in motion, but strong and agile for his stature.

One would also judge, and from many indications, that he had been reared in idleness and luxury, having every want catered to; and such had been the case, for he was the son of a wealthy planter, whose home was on the Trinity river, but a short distance from Galveston. It was reached, from the Island City, by a passage up the bay and bayou to Houston, and thence by horseback—at the time of which we write—a day's ride, and crossing the San Jacinto by a flatboat ferry.

The father was a dissipated man, addicted to horse-racing and gaming. His name was La Fayette Black, generally known as Colonel Black; and the son, who has just been described, had been christened William, but was familiarly known as Bill. By his dissolute companions he had been dubbed "Black Bill," as much from his tricks at cards and jockeying, as from his complexion.

Bill was addicted to gambling and drinking, following in the footsteps of his father, or rather, it would be more correct to say that he kept ahead of his venerable paternal, spending the greater part of his time in Galveston and Houston, and seldom seen at his home on the Rio Trinity.

Many a time had he forged his father's name to obtain the necessary funds for his debauches; but the colonel, rather than have the family name so deeply disgraced, had made the matter right with his bankers—the son promising faithfully, upon each occasion, not to repeat the offense.

But, matters grew worse and worse. Bill drank heavier and heavier, wagering large amounts at cards, and losing considerable sums; and, at the time we introduce him to the reader, he was barely "sobering off" after a protracted spree, in the course of which he had lost quite a sum of money.

The greater part of this had been won by the man with whom he was conversing—Adolphus Drake, a professional gambler of Galveston, but who frequently spread his "lay-out" in Houston and San Antonio.

Dolph Drake, as he called himself, was a large, well-proportioned, handsome man, and gentlemanly in manners; there being nothing in his "make-up," or conversation, when outside of his "den," that would indicate the gambler. He was brave and fearless, in fact reckless to a fault; and, strange to say, when this fact is considered, he was heartless, and utterly without principle, as far as his adopted profession was concerned.

He was ever ready to fleece a man of his last dollar; but, in the outside world, chivalric, sympathetic, and at all times ready to assist any who were less fortunate than himself.

His hand and purse were always open to those in need, and kind words flowed spontaneously from his lips—forcing all—even those

who knew his profession, and his unscrupulous character as far as gambling was concerned—to like and respect him in spite of it.

As Bill Black spoke, his eyes flashed with a gleam of angry impatience, and he reached forward, pouring out a glass of wine, and sliding the same across the table to Drake; seeming eager to study the face of the latter, to judge of the effects of his words, but refraining from doing so.

He then filled his own glass, adding:

"Dolph, shall we not be pards in this thing, all through, and drink now to the success of the enterprise?"

Drake stroked his long, glossy black beard reflectively, studying, as he had throughout the entire conversation, but little of which we have thought it necessary to record, the face and actions of Bill.

At length he spoke, in a deliberate manner, that evidently increased the aggravation of his comrade.

"Let us drink, this time, to the success of my bank to-night; and we'll indulge later on the other matter. I feel sure that you are keeping back something from me, in this affair."

"There is something behind the scenes, Black, that interests you far more than winning the cash and cotton of Major Lindsay."

Bill Black's face showed every expression of anger, notwithstanding that he exerted all his will-power to control himself; and he shot a lightning-like glance at his companion, his eyes, however, merely flitting across the face of Dolph Drake, as he returned, rather hotly:

"I must say, Dolph, you are aggravatingly deliberate, and somewhat insulting as well; but I will own up that there is a little matter of revenge on my part in the affair. Yet, I do not see that it concerns you in any way."

"The ducats are what you are after, and it requires but little fine work to gain them. If we can get the major started to drinking, we can 'skin' him easy. His 'sig.' is good at any bank here, or in Houston; and he'd pay all his losses, even if he had been drunk when he played."

"How much does he carry about him, generally?"

"A considerable sum, I reckon; but that doesn't matter, for he would give his note, and 'buck off' his whole cotton crop, if he got started."

"Where is his plantation?"

"About twenty miles above my old gent's."

"Then you have always been acquainted with the family, I suppose?"

"Yes; known them all my life."

"What has the old man ever done to you, Bill, that you hate him so?"

"How do you know I hate him in particular? Perhaps it is some other member of the family."

"Not a bit of it!" said Dolph. "I am positive you hate the major. You have betrayed it in every word, and in your manner, since we have been conversing. But our wine is losing 'head,' so here goes! Luck to my 'lay-out' to-night!"

Most people become either pale or red when in a rag; but Black Bill was hardly human in character, and he grew nearly black.

Both returned their glasses to the table, and Drake coolly lit a cigar, saying carelessly:

"You are evidently in a bad humor to-night, Bill; but it is your own fault. You have been beating about the bush in this business. Hasn't Major Lindsay a daughter?"

"I think, as is usual, there must be a woman in the case. Come, how is it, Black? You must be square and above board, if you want me to join you in this thing."

"Well," said the other, hesitatingly, "you are right. You're a deuced sharp one, Dolph. There is a woman in the case. The major has a daughter—a lovely girl—Lulu by name, and I will confess to you, Dolph, that I'm in love with her. There, you have it!"

"I would do anything—quit playing and drinking, and go to raising cotton, if she would link her fate with mine. Hang it! I feel ashamed of my past life, when I think of her."

"If I was worthy of her, I'd be the happiest man on the Lord's footstool! But, I am what I am. The zebra can't change his stripes."

"You astonish me, Bill Black!"

"Why so?"

"You just proposed ruining her father. What kind of a man are you, for gracious' sake?"

"That's the only method through which I can open a way to gain her hand."

"Then you have proposed to her?"

"Yes, if you must know it, and have been scornfully rejected. Not only so, but the old man actually ordered me off his plantation."

"Ah! I see, I see. Why did you not tell me all this in the first place?"

"Because I thought you might refuse to have anything to do with fleecing the major, if you knew of there being any other motive than mere gain. I know how you stand there usually."

"You are not deceiving me now, Bill Black? You do not intend to wrong this girl after having ruined her father financially?"

"My one great wish is to make her my wife."

"But then, you know she detests you."

"She'll get over that. When the major is brought to poverty, and I can make a raise out of my old gent, I have no fears of success."

"But Major Lindsay will have a word to say on the subject. He may lay his ruin at your door."

"I'll risk all that, if you will only do your part. I'll inveigle him into your rooms after hours—disguising myself for the purpose—and together we'll 'skin' him."

"You can have two-thirds of the winnings, and I'll use his own money to help me in gaining the hand of his daughter."

"If I thought it would make a better man of you, I'd do it, Bill; but I'm afraid you are beyond redemption. There may be a chance, however, and of late I have been very suspicious that you were going headlong to the bad."

"I'll play into your hand, I reckon, as you propose; but, mark my words, if you wrong that girl, after fleecing her father, I'll kill you as sure as my name is Dolph Drake!"

"You're getting very moral of late, it strikes me, Dolph; extremely so to-night. But I assure you I intend to marry the girl."

"Give us your fist, old boy. I'm rejoiced at my success in winning you over to my cause; and I assure you that you will never regret having taken this thing up."

"Of course you'll be forced to 'skip' the town, and go to Orleans for a while, to prevent unpleasant investigations; but you're used to that."

"No, I shall stay right here. To leave the town would be suspicious in itself, and I do not want any one to think I had a hand in this thing, if I should go into it."

"I shall disguise myself also, and the major must be made so drunk that we can lay him away in the rooms until after the checks have been cashed and the cotton orders disposed of."

"I think, perhaps, you are right, Dolph. I'll manage to have the old fellow drunk enough for our purposes; and it will be easy enough to 'prime' him up after or during the game. We'll arrange it."

"Fill up again, Dolph! We'll drink now to success in our mutual project or plot, or whatever you may call it."

Again the glasses were filled and clicked together, and the pair drank.

The face of Black Bill was, by this time, filled with joyous exultation, which seemed to be interpreted by his companion. The latter, however, did not appear to care further about the matter in hand, and said nothing.

Drake's face wore a placid, self-satisfied, devil may-care expression, as he shook hands with Black Bill, left the house, and walked down the street, clear of the suburbs of the city. None so gay and debonnaire as Adolphus Drake.

He sauntered carelessly along the Strand, swinging his gold-headed cane, and smoking with apparently the calmest enjoyment, as he gazed, with an admiring eye, out over the broad waters of the Gulf of Mexico, which now lay, smooth and unruffled, a sheet of gold, beneath the blood-red declining sun.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE BAYOU.

BAYOU PLANTATION, the home of Major Lindsay, who was originally from Louisiana, was situated on the south bank of the Trinity river, some fifteen miles from its mouth.

The dwelling was on a curve in the river, the stream sweeping to the north; and half a mile east of the mansion, down the Rio Trinity, a bayou let out from the river for a quarter of a mile inland, to the south. Hence the name of the plantation.

The house was built in the prevailing Southern style; two stories in height, with a wide veranda in front and at each end, up the posts of which, as well as between the windows, was a network of climbing roses and other flowering vines, which nearly hid the mansion's woodwork from view, causing it to appear like an immense arbor.

The dwelling fronted toward the bayou east, one end being next to the river; and the gradual decline, opposite, was a most beautiful and tastefully laid out garden, extending out to the orchards of lemon and orange trees. The walks were lined with box, and the flower-beds were rich in all the colors of the rainbow, with brilliant and fragrant flowers.

Near to the house, the bottom-timber had been cleared of all dead wood, and the undergrowth cut away; except in such places as added to the picturesqueness of the forest scene.

One could gallop headlong, here and there, amid the huge tree-trunks, and the shades were agreeably cool in the hottest days of summer.

The river-bank was high, and in some places perpendicular. Masses of earth, and even trees, occasionally fell with a great splashing into the river, as the banks were undermined by the swirling waters, the current being quite rapid.

The river was at this point fully a thousand yards in width; a lordly stream, and not fordable—an old flatboat, which was held by a huge

rope cable, being the only means of crossing the Trinity for a day's journey, excepting the small boats that were owned by the more wealthy planters.

The ferry was a mile above Bayou Plantation.

A long row of whitewashed cabins, occupied by the negroes, extended some five hundred yards in the rear of the mansion. The cabin of the inevitable and potential cook, together with a huge stone bake-oven, stood directly in the rear, and but ten yards distant; while the stables were beyond the slave-quarters.

Afar to the south lay vast fields of cotton and corn, there being cart-roads between; and a well-kept drive swept in a curve around the front of the mansion, continuing on in a circle, past the negro-cabins and back to the same point where it left the fenced fields. Thence it led on in a southerly route to the county road to Houston.

The home of Major Lindsay was furnished in a rich and luxurious style for the time and place; containing, among much that was really elegant, a piano and a harp, of large size and very costly.

Afar, toward Galveston Bay, one could gaze over a vast stretch of fields of snow-white cotton and golden corn—fields that were neatly inclosed with oak-rail Virginia, or zig-zag fences.

The towering timber abounded in high, cathedral-like domes, beautified by thousands of drooping festoons of Spanish moss, which, when there was a high wind, swayed gracefully to and fro, lending to the natural turrets and arches a weird appearance.

Such was Bayou Plantation, and its attractive surroundings, the whole making up a typical Southern home of a wealthy planter—all, around and within it, being lovely in the extreme, and indicating peace, plenty and happiness.

It was three days previous to that upon which Black Bill induced Dolph Drake to join him in a plot to ruin Major Lindsay, that a fair girl tripped from the parlor window of the mansion at Bayou Plantation, and, book in hand, threw herself into one of the Mexican hammocks, that were hung beneath the vine-embowered veranda.

She was indeed a most lovely maiden, and one who would chain the admiration of even her own sex.

Of medium height and perfect contour of form and face, with the graceful movement of a young antelope, the most beautiful golden hair in the world, the reddest and ripest of pouting lips, and wine-brown eyes, half hidden beneath long, curling lashes—such was Lulu Lindsay, the only child of the planter, heiress of a considerable fortune, and the acknowledged belle of the Lower Trinity.

Her mother had been dead some five years at the commencement of our story, but the girl had been carefully reared and instructed in all the branches considered necessary in the education of a young lady at that time, music included.

Upon the particular occasion on which we introduce our heroine to the reader, her wealth of golden hair was but partially confined by a blue silk ribbon, the long and wavy locks hanging free to her waist behind, a wreath of creeping vines and little star-shaped blue flowerets being twined about her shapely head amid her golden hair.

A dress composed of some light India fabric, and a blue silk jacket, loose in fit, with real lace collar and cuffs—such was the costume of Lulu Lindsay, this bright and beautiful morning.

And the girl was in perfect consonance with it and with her surroundings. There was a vivacity in the glance of her eye, and a quickness of motion, that proved her to be of nervous temperament, and remarkably gifted with exuberant spirits and a liveliness seldom met with in the fair and sunny South, where the climate tends to make all more or less indolent.

The book which the maiden had brought with her was soon cast into a chair near the hammock; and she now reclined, gazing out over the broad eastern vista, between the veranda posts.

It was but too evident, however, that, although surrounded by every luxury, even with all that the most exacting tastes and inclinations could desire, she was ill at ease, and worried in regard to some matter over which she had no control.

This feeling, however, was shown in a melting sadness, and impatient change of position, without a frown being visible on her fair, clear brow. Her very look proved that her sadness was sacred to herself alone—that she would confide her trouble to none, except possibly on most deeply loved.

As she lay thus, her eyes bent beyond the gardens, and across the bayou to the far-distant fields, one could see that there was a far-away, absent expression in her beautiful eyes; and that she was now flying on the wings of thought, evidently deeply concerned in regard to some absent one.

Inaction eventually seemed to increase the fair girl's uneasiness of mind to a feeling that

was akin to apprehension. This, as by a powerful effort of the will, she threw off; and, springing from her hammock, she tripped into the hall, and up the stairs to her chamber—there, leaning out of her window, and blowing a series of notes on a silver whistle.

In ten minutes' time, the maiden again appeared upon the veranda, clad in a green riding habit of light texture, and with a coquettish gypsy hat upon her head. This last was trimmed to match the dress, which was tight-fitting from the waist up; showing her Venus-like form, in all its perfection.

She held in her hand a gold-mounted riding-whip, and after plucking a few flowers with which to decorate her hat, she drew on her gloves, and tapped her foot nervously with her whip, while she gazed down the drive, toward the bottom-timber.

She had but a moment or two to wait, however, when up the drive came a little negro boy, leading a milk-white pony, fully caparisoned with a richly-stamped and ornamented side-saddle and bridle.

"What's the matter, Pomp?" inquired Lulu, as she perceived the eyes of the boy fixed upon her in wonder, when he saw her seated in the saddle.

"How is Blanco? But I needn't ask, for I see you have taken excellent care of him. Say, Pomp, I gave Wash the money to buy you some new clothes in Houston, when he went with your master to the boat."

"Thanks, Miss Lulu," said the little darky; his great round eyes, however, speaking his joy and gratitude far louder than words, as he doffed his tattered hat, and stood, holding the pony for his young mistress.

The next moment, the white pony, as proud, apparently, of his fair burden, as it was in equine nature to be, cavorted along the drive, with its neck gracefully arched, in the direction of the fields, soon getting beyond them.

Then, a touch of the whip, with one softly spoken word of command, and away Blanco went, skimming the plain like a bird, through flowers of every hue and degree of fragrance.

CHAPTER III.

WORKING THE PLOT.

THE bar-room of the Island City Hotel was fitted up in a costly manner, and was an apartment of considerable size and height.

A very large French mirror, with a gilt frame, fitted behind the bar, reflected the features of those who stepped up to order their potations.

Richly-carved shelves at each side of the mirror were loaded with glasses of all sizes and colors; while rare vases, and groups of small statuary stood in the immediate front, on the shelf that was flush with the bar counter. Upon this was also a long row of cut-glass decanters, filled with various kinds of liquors.

Paintings of the chase and frontier life, with sporting pictures, decorated the walls; and roomy chairs were placed at intervals, besides paper-racks, proving that the bar was also used as a reading-room. In every way it had been made inviting.

It was about eleven o'clock on the night following that on which Dolph Drake and Bill Black had their interview, that a tall, fine-looking old gentleman, entered the bar just described.

He was elegantly dressed, and walked with the air of a gentleman of the old school, swinging his cane in a somewhat abstracted manner as he paced back and forth in the rear part of the brilliantly-lighted bar-room.

His hair was thickly sprinkled with gray, his face was reddish and clean-shaven, and his eyes a clear blue. His form was well-developed, indicating great strength, while his step and motion showed great suppleness for one of his age.

He was attired in black broadcloth throughout, and wore upon his head a planter's soft felt hat of the same hue.

He had not been long in the bar when he pulled out a massive gold watch, and compared his time with the large gilt clock over the door. He then seated himself, and taking a newspaper from a rack, began to peruse it.

There were no other persons in the room at this time, strange to say, except the bar-keeper.

Not more than five minutes did the old gentleman sit thus when a spasm of pain contorted his face, and he arose slowly and hesitatingly, approaching the bar and leaning upon it, gazing for a moment at his reflection in the mirror.

The attentive bar-keeper stepped quickly to the front to receive his orders.

"I am not in the habit of drinking," said the old gentleman; "in fact, I have not indulged in anything of the kind for more than a year, for the simple reason that I become a perfect maniac if I drink much, and when I get a taste it awakens an ungovernable appetite for more. But I am ill to-night. I think it must be from walking late on the Strand. I have, perhaps, taken a slight cold, as I was perspiring freely when I went out. That must be it."

"Please to give me a 'pony' of French brandy with a squirt of Jamaica ginger in it. That will probably do me some good."

"Certainly, Major Lindsay," returned the

obliging bar-keeper; "I have no doubt it will."

He then placed a bottle of cognac, and a tiny wine glass upon the bar, before the major.

"It is a cool night on the Strand," he continued; "the wind is north, I believe?"

"I think it is," was the reply. "Indeed I am quite positive of it. That is an excellent brand of liquor, I have no doubt, but very strong. Perhaps it is because I have not been accustomed to it lately, but it nearly strangled me."

"It is quite strong, major. I ought to have diluted it for you, perhaps."

"Never mind! I'm all right now. Give me a couple of cloves."

The bar-keeper passed a small, silver plate, containing the spice desired, and the major, after selecting a few, returned to his former position, and again commenced pacing the room. Soon he stepped with the lightness of youth, his eyes flashing, while he indulged in a low soliloquy, accompanied by the most graceful gestures.

Two minutes had scarce elapsed, when a young man stepped hastily from the office and rotunda; and, glancing quickly inside, flashed a look at the old major, and then as hastily retired.

This man, with the manner and actions of a spy, was indeed one; for he was none other than "Black Bill," although his most intimate friend would not have recognized him in his present "make-up."

Bill had assumed a false mustache and imperial, both of large size, and of a color to correspond with his ebon hair. He wore a wide-brimmed soft sombrero, pulled low over his forehead.

He knew, at a glance, that the old planter had taken a drink, and thus broken down the barrier between sobriety and semi-insanity.

He had seen Major Lindsay there, on previous occasions, and he well knew that the plot he had formed to ruin him would probably succeed.

"Let loose his bounds on me, will he?" muttered Bill, in soliloquy, from between his grating teeth, as he thought of the major's threats in the past.

"There can be no torture more excruciating than that which I have suffered, since being repulsed by the daughter, and insulted by the father!"

"If Dolph had known the hell of hate I bear toward all who claim the name of Lindsay, he would never have joined me in this plot."

"Ye gods! I could plunge a knife into that old fellow's heart with insane joy; and I may do it yet, for I cannot govern myself at all times."

"I did love that girl, but I hate her—I detest her now. Woe to the man or woman who crosses the path of Bill Black!"

"The old cuss is playing right into my hand. I'm favored from the start; for, from some inexplicable reason, he has taken a drink, and that will lead him to his ruin."

"He's ripe for the plucking, and I'll play my little game to the bitter end. I'll play to win, and I will win—I swear it!"

"Lulu Lindsay, you shall yet grovel at my feet! You shall yet beg and sue to Bill Black!"

In ten minutes more the disguised young man re-entered the Island City Hotel with four of his boon companions; this time from the rear door, thus avoiding going through the office.

These men were all known in Galveston, but they were now gotten up in perfectly unrecognizable shape, and as many strangers were in the city, continually coming and going, but little notice was taken of them. On this they had confidently counted.

All now ranged themselves at the bar in a somewhat hilarious manner. Bill having inveigled his friends into the plot, although they knew nothing of his sentiments in regard to the major, all believing it to be an innocent lark, and Bill trusting to luck to get Major Lindsay secretly to the rooms of Dolph Drake.

"Come, gents. Nominate your liquid refreshments," called out Black Bill, with a flourishing gesture, as he glanced into the mirror, feigning to adjust his necktie, but in reality to examine the face of the major, who was standing behind him.

Turning quickly, as his comrades were pouring out their liquor, Bill exclaimed, in a cheery and familiar voice, addressing the old gentleman:

"Come, my friend. Won't you join us in a social glass? We're Brazos boys, and don't often get into Galveston; but when we do, we want to enjoy ourselves. What might the gentleman's name be?"

This question Bill put aside to the barkeeper.

"That is Major Lindsay, of the 'Rio Trinity,' sir," was the reply of the vender of liquors, who, though he knew Black Bill well, was unable to recognize him.

The major had hesitated at the first invitation.

"What! You don't say?" said Bill, in as-

sumed surprise at the answer of the bar-keeper. "Why, I have often heard of the gentleman! Major Lindsay"—turning again and addressing the gentleman—"come, join us, will you not? I know you well, by reputation, though I've never before had the pleasure of meeting you. Excuse my former abruptness."

Major Lindsay now slowly advanced toward the bar, but with an absent, pre-occupied air, balancing his cane in the middle between his thumb and finger.

Bill's comrades began to perceive that the major was a little "off his cabase," and that their festive friend was disposed to have a good time at his expense.

This had been the pre-arranged programme in the mind of Black Bill, he having gotten his associates started for the ostensible purpose of attending a disreputable dance down the Strand.

They, as a matter of course, were entirely ignorant of the intentions of their leader in regard to any project outside of the aforesaid dance.

Black Bill intended to cover his trail well and then to trust to circumstances for the success of his plot. So far it promised well.

"Major Lindsay," he now said, cheerily and with respect, as he touched the rim of his hat, "pardon my familiarity, but I feel as though I was acquainted with you, from having heard my uncle, Colonel Langley, on the Brazos, speak so frequently of you. I believe you and he were warm friends in the old days, were you not?"

The eyes of the major brightened, his form straightened with pride and pleasure, as he extended his hand quickly, with much interest manifested in his voice and manner, as he said:

"Colonel Langley! Why, bless my soul, yes! He was a very intimate friend of mine. Some years ago now, I remember, we met at this very bar."

"I am extremely pleased to meet his nephew. What might be your name?"

"Pardon me for not mentioning it," said Bill, as he shook the major's hand, with much warmth. "My name is Lawrence Lane. My mother was a sister of Colonel Langley's wife."

Bill Black knew everybody within a hundred miles of Houston; consequently he was not forced to jeopardize his plans by any false names.

"Allow me, Major Lindsay, to introduce my friends," continued Bill; "all young men from the Brazos"—he then presented them, by fictitious names, adding—"we are on a slight jollification, and think of looking in on a dance, down the Strand. What will you take, major?"

"The same I had before, Mr. Blossom," said the old gentleman, with a lordly flourish of his hand to the bar-keeper.

All drank, and then Bill ordered cigars. Then one of the associates of the plotter ordered Heidseick champagne for the party, which the major could not refuse to drink, without appearing discourteous; and this with the brandy, set his brain in a whirl, "knocking him entirely off his balance," so to speak. The plot was progressing.

All thoughts of past misery, and the agony and anguish which must follow a debauch, were now banished from the major's mind. He drew a large wallet from his pocket, literally "stuffed" with bank-notes of large denominations, and throwing a one hundred dollar bill upon the counter ordered the sparkling wine of France for the party.

Bud Blossom, the bar-keeper, had not been in Galveston quite a year; consequently he knew nothing of the insane doings of the major, when intoxicated. He, therefore, gave not a thought to the matter.

Thus an hour passed; all drinking many times, and Major Lindsay, becoming stiff and lordly, striving to maintain a sober dignity, which was really ludicrous.

All except Black Bill were, by this time, much under the influence of liquor, and he pretended to be in the same fix; but he poured the greater part of his liquor into the spittoon at his feet.

Realizing that the time for action had arrived, Bill purchased a bottle of brandy, and proposed to start for the Strand; seeking an opportunity to instruct his comrades not to invite the major to accompany them to the dance, as he might cause trouble.

With this understanding, all left the bar, and the Island City Hotel, by the rear exit, Bill requesting Major Lindsay to walk a short distance with them in the cool air, before he retired.

The major accepted the invitation, and set out in the direction of the Strand, Bill soon bidding the old planter good-night, as did they all; leaving him standing in the street, but a short distance from the hotel.

It was a moonless night, and the stars were dim from a hazy atmosphere; yet there was sufficient light to detect a human form at some distance.

Bill's comrades, arm in arm, went on their way, singing bacchanalian songs, until they reached a lumber-yard. There, they seated themselves upon some projecting boards, and

the plotter invited all to take a drink of the brandy he had with him.

All drank, and again began to sing, until they thought it time to imbibe once more; when, to their astonishment and indignation, they perceived that their number was decreased by one.

Black Bill had disappeared!

All search for him, accompanied by loud yells, failed of success; but, so intoxicated were they all, that their search was not very systematic.

Soon they started on once more toward the Strand, filling the night air with boisterous songs and yells of the most hideous description.

CHAPTER IV.

RIDING INTO DANGER.

On sped the white pony, over the plain: at times turning to gaze up into the face of his mistress, to solicit a word of praise for his speed.

And words of praise he did get, in a silvery voice, and the face of the fair Lulu beamed with pleasure; the prairie air, so exhilarating banished all the worry and apprehension which had haunted her but a little while before.

To let the reader into the secret of Lulu Lindsay's trouble, her father had gone to Galveston; and she was not only without him, but she feared that he would take to drinking, as he had done upon a previous visit—a year before—to the Island City. The major had then returned in a most deplorable condition; being at the very point of death, for some time, in consequence.

Had Lulu known of the avalanche of horror, anguish and grief, that would be launched upon her, through that fatal visit of her father to Galveston, or even a fraction of it, she would have fallen fainting from her pony to the prairie sward.

For a year, the fair girl's life had been one continued summer's dream, unalloyed by anything that could mar her happiness; but she was doomed to such anguish, agony of heart, and despair, as few mortals are called upon to suffer.

And to make this misery appear more poignant, more torturing, she was fated to experience, in the interval before she should learn of the terrible calamity that would nearly strike her dead—she was to be taught what it was to love; to experience the greatest earthly happiness that one is capable of experiencing.

But all this is anticipating.

The maiden gave her pony free rein, casting her eyes in admiring glances over the flower-bespangled plain in all directions. The sun was now fully four hours above the horizon—a great blazing orb of fire in the brazen sky—and Blanco soon began to pant, and the foam to fly from his lips, instinctively swerving from the course his fair mistress had originally headed him, toward the north. There the bottom timber towered, a huge wall of verdure, dark green, and inviting in the extreme to one traversing the hot plain.

Soon Blanco shot beneath the cool shades, and wound here and there, at a slow pace, around the dense thickets, following the hard-beaten cow-paths in the direction of the river.

But the pony was disappointed in regard to refreshing himself at the water, which he evidently expected to find, for the bank was at least fifteen feet from the water, and shelving.

Lulu was obliged to clutch the reins, and jerk the pony to a halt, or he would have walked dangerously near to the treacherous bank.

Seated in her saddle, the maiden gazed out between the tree holes, over the broad river, which rolled, whirling and rippling—a wide and grand mass of waters—to mingle soon with the mighty Mexique Gulf.

Blanco pawed impatiently, evidently craving the water, and tantalized by the sight of it, which, for all the good it had done him, might as well have been a thousand miles away.

Suddenly, however, the pony straightened stiff, throwing up his head, with a snort that was half-suspicion and half-fright.

Lulu noticed this, and broke out impatiently: "What is the matter with you, Blanco? Don't you know you cannot possibly get a drink until you return home? Don't get excited now. It is cool and nice here, and we will go back directly."

She was here interrupted by the animal whirling half-about, like a flash, and facing the dark shades. At the same time he gave out a series of terrified snorts, laid his ears back upon his head, and stood trembling in every limb, his eyes fixed upward amid the branches of the trees.

Guided by the direction in which the eyes of Blanco were fixed, Lulu's face became as ghastly as that of a corpse, and her features drawn in dread terror.

And well might the fair girl turn pale, and shudder. Well might the blood chill in her veins.

Lying along a limb, at an angle of forty-five degrees from the pony's head, and only about ten feet above the level of Lulu's saddle, was a huge panther. There it lay; its claws working nervously, tearing the bark from the limb, its

ringed tail lashing about its sides; the hairs standing out, and causing it to appear like a huge serpent. The eyes of the terrible beast glared with ferocity and hunger—its lips curling away from its white and gleaming teeth.

Blanco stood paralyzed, and unable to break from the horrible fascination of the panther's gaze; and the poor girl sat, as rigid and immovable as if suddenly turned to stone—dazed with horror, and unable to move even a finger!

Thus, for fully two minutes were they situated; Blanco quivering, and Lulu, with her breath coming and going in gasps, and whispered prayers upon her lips, and in her heart.

At the end of this time, the back of the panther arched, cat-like; its claws were buried in the bark, and its muscles drawn for the terrible bound through the air.

Then it was, that the report of a rifle rung, with terrific sound, and echoed through the arches of the bottom-timber; and the panther flew through the air, its legs flying spasmodically, directly down toward the pony's head.

Its bound had been made short by the bullet, which had pierced its brain, just as the beast launched itself from the limb.

At this moment, a young man spurred quickly forward, from up the river, upon a superb black horse; but too late to prevent the catastrophe, that instantly followed after the panther struck the earth, and lay writhing in the spasms of death.

The instant the report of the rifle burst on the air, and the panther left the limb, Blanco sprung, with terrified snorts, backward; just in time to avoid the beast, as it struck the earth. Then the pony sprung back further, his hinder parts falling over the shelving bank of the river; hanging down over the dark and rolling waters!

For a moment, Blanco sustained himself, terror in his eyes, as he clung by his fore-feet.

This was for an instant only, during which Lulu caught sight of her preserver, coming at headlong speed; and, with a piercing shriek of mortal terror, she thrust forward her arms over the head of her pony. Then, poor Blanco, quivering in every limb, lost his little remaining strength; and both shot downward, disappearing, with a far-sounding plunge, beneath the surface of the Trinity—throwing the spray up into the face of the young man who had shot the panther, as he dashed up, and sprung from his horse!

But, to explain the presence of the young man, who arrived so opportunely upon the scene, when Lulu Lindsay was in such deadly peril:

About the same time that Blanco walked into view of the river, and Lulu drew the pony to a halt, to prevent a nearer approach to the bank, this young man rode down the river, at a slow pace, his rifle thrown in the hollow of his left arm; and he gazing in every direction, seemingly in search of game.

Horse and man seemed created for each other—the animal being a noble specimen of its kind, black and glossy, with clean limbs, marked for speed and endurance.

The man was a perfect Apollo in form and face.

He was about five feet, ten inches in height, and with long, wavy, dark-brown hair and hazel eyes. His chin and lip were decorated with a glossy mustache and imperial.

His brow was high and broad, and his face very handsome. His features were regular, with a nose and chin purely Grecian in type, that indicated great firmness; while the glance of his eye was enough to give him credit for dauntless bravery.

His every movement was grace itself, and the quick jerk of his head, at the slightest disturbance of the foliage by bird, squirrel or opossum, showed that he was electric-like in motion.

All in all, he was as noble and handsome a specimen of manhood as one generally sees—one to command admiration in any assemblage in the civilized, or uncivilized world.

His apparel consisted of dark pantaloons of strong texture, blue woolen shirt, with wide and flowing collar, loosely confined at the neck by a black kerchief tied in a square knot.

He wore high-legged boots of fine workmanship, upon the heels of which were a pair of spurs of Mexican make, with medium-sized rowels.

About his waist was a richly-stamped belt, also of Mexican make, with a large, square clasp of solid silver. Upon this was cut deep the five-pointed Lone Star of Texas, and around this, in a crescent form, was engraved the name:

"HERBERT HOWARD."

This belt sustained in scabbards, without weather-flaps, a brace of Colt's army revolvers, and the inevitable bowie-knife of the border; also a leather percussion-cap box and a tinder-box.

A roll of blankets, extra lasso, tin cup, canteen, and a pair of *molettos*, or buckskin saddle-bags, were secured to the cantle of his saddle in a neat manner; while a bullet-pouch, with powder-horn attached, hung from his saddle

horn, which had also his horse's coil of neck-ropes.

Passing down the river, along the bank and but a short distance from the edge of the same, Herbert Howard had his first view of Lulu Lindsay, as she sat upon her white pony, gazing over the river, as we have before described.

Herbert—or Herb, as he was familiarly called—drew rein, filled with surprise and admiration.

Never before had such a vision of angelic loveliness burst upon him, even in his rosiest dreams.

He could hardly believe that it was real, and he rubbed his eyes to assure himself that he was awake.

His horse had made no noise upon the thick carpet of dead leaves, and he drew the animal back, partly around a thicket.

At this instant, to his amazement, the young man perceived the white pony whirl about with every evidence of terror; the beautiful maiden also appearing to be frightened beyond measure.

Slowly Herbert walked his horse toward the transcendently lovely apparition of the wood, but kept the bushes between her and him, fearing to alarm her.

He was puzzled also as to her apparent fright, but did not imagine that anything serious threatened her. Great, however, was his horror a moment after.

Soon he discovered the panther, about to spring down, and tear the angelic maiden to pieces!

Knowing that not an instant was to be lost, he took careful aim at the head of the horrible beast, and pulled trigger.

The reader knows the result.

When Blanco sprang backward, and slid over the bank, the fair girl holding her arms toward him, piteously pleading, while her shrieks cut the air, the young man was tortured almost beyond endurance. He feared that the pony, when in the water, would kill its lovely mistress by its struggles.

Herbert knew that both must fall into the river before he could reach them; and, fall they did, as our hero galloped up.

With the quickness of thought he sprang to the earth, unloosed his belt of arms, jerked off his boots and hat, and cast them aside with careless rapidity. He then launched himself over the bank, and into the river.

CHAPTER V.

TRUE TO HIS FAITH.

BLACK BILL had invited his dissolute associates into the lumber-yard, for the express purpose of escaping them; and he knew that, when they found he had vanished, they would not think particularly strange of it, he having done the same more than once before, in their experience with him.

He now stole around the pile of lumber, and ran like a deer, through the semi-darkness, to the spot where he had left Major Lindsay.

To Bill's intense joy, the old planter stood in the same place, leaning upon his cane.

Slowly he walked to the side of his intended victim, exclaiming, with well-assumed surprise:

"Why, major, is this you? I was somewhat startled at seeing a man standing motionless in the street. Come, let us return to the hotel, and get a 'night-cap.' What do you say?"

"Is that you, Mr. Lane?" asked the old man, in a husky voice, that betrayed his condition.

"Yes; did you not recognize me?"

"Hardly; but never mind. I'm a little under the weather. Not used to drinking, you see."

"I'll fix you O. K.," said Bill, taking the arm of the major. "I hope the bar isn't closed."

Bill well knew that it was.

Plotter and victim walked arm in arm up the street.

All was darkness about the Island City Hotel, and it needed little persuasion to induce the old planter to proceed to the rooms to which he was cordially invited.

Very soon the two were seated in a handsomely furnished apartment ablaze with light.

A side-board of black walnut stood at one end of the room, and a round table beneath the chandelier. All the appointments were simply elegant, and everything in perfect harmony.

The room was vacant as the pair entered, and, intoxicated as he was, the eyes of the major were filled with some show of astonishment as he stared around him. The luxury almost sobered him.

"Take a seat, Major Lindsay," said Black Bill; "my friend, who kindly entertains me when I am in town, is, I think, in the next room."

As he spoke, Dolph Drake appeared.

No one would have recognized the noted gambler.

Shaved, with the exception of a mustache and goatee, his face rouged and powdered, and his hair cut close, he had the appearance of a French count.

His costume too was in keeping; consisting of a gorgeous dressing-gown and smoking-cap.

A. Dolph thus appeared, he was strikingly

handsome, and with the extreme politeness of a polished Frenchman, he advanced into the room.

He greeted Black Bill most courteously.

"Excuse the lateness of the hour, count, and allow me my friend, Major Lindsay, of the Rio Trinity! Major Lindsay, Count La Croix!"

The major arose from his chair, and standing erect, with mingled pride and pleasure, he made a step forward, and grasped the hand of the pretended count, whose words of welcome were polite and profuse.

"Step up to the side-board, gentlemen, and indulge! Mr. Lane, do me the favor of assisting in the duties of host. Set out the glasses!"

"Major Lindsay, what stimulant do you prefer? We have almost everything here. Make your choice!"

"Brandy!" almost gasped the old man, now trembling.

All drank, the major taking an unusually large quantity, which braced his nerves, and caused him to feel much better. Then, at the invitation of the "count," he seated himself, as did the others.

"Shall we have a lunch?" asked the host, politely.

"Thanks; I don't care for anything," said Black Bill quickly, with a secret gesture to Dolph.

"Come to think, I don't believe I have anything eatable at this late hour," said Drake, hesitatingly, understanding now that Bill did not wish the major to eat, as indeed a lunch would in a measure sober the old gentleman.

"To kill time, count, if you are not sleepy, I will ask revenge for my losses last night. Let us play, if Major Lindsay will excuse us."

"Don't let me interfere with your amusements," was the reply of the old planter; "I am quite comfortable, and shall enjoy watching your game."

"Thanks for your consideration," returned Dolph.

Cards were produced and soon the two were deeply engaged in a game of poker, Dolph winning nearly every "pot." Will made heavy bets and gave his check on the Brazos Bank, until he averred that he had reached the limit of his deposits.

Then six field-hands, five female slaves, and ten children followed the bank account; and to crown all, sixty bales of cotton were won by the pretended count.

Black Bill arose from the table in a fury.

"I am ruined!" he cried. "I shall blow my brains out! All gone—all gone!"

Up sprang Major Lindsay, and stalked toward the side-board, his eyes wild and desperate. Pouring out a stiff glass of brandy, which he swallowed hastily, he held out his hand to Bill, and said, in a kindly tone:

"Mr. Lane, you have been my friend to-night. You are the nephew of an old and dear friend, and I sympathize with you. I was once considered a fair hand at cards, and if the count is agreeable, I will play him, and win your money back or lose my own."

"If you will but try!" said the young man, with a most grateful look. "I know the count would return what he has won, through friendship; but I could not accept, unless it was fairly won back."

"Count, will you give me a show, through the major, to get back a portion of my losses?"

"Most certainly, my dear boy! I don't want to retain anything that is yours. You can have them."

"They must be fairly won back, before I can take them," answered Bill, rushing for another drink.

Major Lindsay deliberately seated himself at the table, filled with this new and heroic determination.

"Count La Croix" smiled placidly, while he shuffled the cards, and placed the deck in the middle of the table for the major to cut for deal.

The old planter won the deal, and remarked: "Count, please produce all the checks and bills of sale, or orders from Mr. Lane, and state the amount. The first good hand I have I shall make a bet equal to it."

Dolph produced them, figuring them up.

"They foot up just sixty thousand dollars, major."

"Good! I'll remember."

Dolph here cried out, in a boisterous and reckless manner:

"Mr. Lane, pass the brandy and glasses this way, if you please. This game promises to be interesting."

Black Bill sullenly complied with the request.

The cards were dealt by Major Lindsay.

Dolph bet a thousand dollars as a "feeler," the major going twenty thousand better on the instant.

Dolph "saw" the twenty, and raised it twenty more, each time placing checks and bills of sale, won from Black Bill, in the "pot"—the major, after the first bet, filling out a check for the amount of his bet.

He "saw" Dolph's extra twenty, and raised twenty more. Dolph "called," there being then

one hundred and twenty thousand dollars in the "pot."

Major Lindsay triumphantly displayed four kings, and reached forward for the money, securities and papers.

"Hold!" cried out the pretended count. "I take the 'pot'—I can beat your four kings. Look!"

To the amazement of the fuddled major, the "count" showed four aces, and "raked the board."

Black Bill went into paroxysms of rage, acting his part well; but the major sat like one who was suddenly bereft of life.

Rising, at last, he staggered to the side-board, and, clutching the first bottle he came to, which proved to be gin, he poured out nearly a full glass and drank it with insane avidity. Then, whirling, he returned to the table, exclaiming:

"Shuffle again! I'll win or lose a fortune on this deal, and without bluffing!"

The eyes of Black Bill glittered.

Dolph shuffled and dealt, affecting to do it very awkwardly, and as if half-intoxicated.

One thousand dollars was placed in the "pot" by each before the deal. It was the major's bet and he cast in an order, or bill of sale, for one-half his cotton crop—sixty bales.

The "count" saw this bet and raised it thirty thousand dollars. Thus the "pot" swelled until the old planter had wagered all his cotton, and notes that covered the value of all his field-hands, with the women and their children—in fact, all his slaves except his house servants—and full half the value of his plantation.

All this was "covered" by the "count."

The "call" was made by the "count."

"I have three aces and a king," said the major.

"Your hand is not good," asserted the "count," displaying his cards; "I hold four jacks!"

For a moment the apartment was as silent as the tomb. Major Lindsay sat, as if paralyzed. Then he sprang to his feet, and, bounding across the room to where Black Bill stood, struck that worthy a blow in the side of the head that would have felled an ox. Bill dropped to the floor in an instant, as if a bullet had pierced his brain. Then, darting into the middle of the room, the major jerked his bowie and dashed, with insane fury, upon the man who had won his money.

Dolph fully realized his terrible danger, but resolved not to kill his antagonist unless to save his own life.

Like tigers these two powerful men sprang upon each other, knives in hand.

For a moment there was a rapid play of steel, and then the manly form of Dolph Drake fell with a heavy crash upon the floor, causing the cut-glass ornaments on the chandelier to rattle together.

And there, in that brilliantly-lighted and gorgeously-furnished room, stood the old planter, crazed by brandy and murder mad. And there, before him, lay, outstretched, the handsome form of the chivalric gambler, who could have slain his opponent easily, but refrained from so doing, for he knew that he had been the cause of the old man's ruin and madness!

There lay the proud and aristocratic gamester, his career of mingled good and evil ended, his heart's blood welling out upon the velvet carpet, his soulless eyes fixed upon the ceiling—dead!

CHAPTER VI.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

WHEN Herbert Howard plunged over the high banks into the Trinity river, to save Lulu Lindsay, he had the forethought and judgment to strike the water above where the maiden and her pony had disappeared; knowing that he might endanger the life of the young girl, and peril his own, if he darted beneath the waters upon the struggling pony.

So quick were his movements, that he was over the bank before Blanco appeared on the rise.

Luckily, the current at this point, was but sluggish, owing to a bend in the river a short distance above. When, therefore, the young man arose from the water, he saw the pony swimming and snorting down-stream, keeping close to the bank, up which it was impossible to mount.

To the great concern and apprehension of our hero, the maiden was not to be seen; and he then felt sure that she had fainted before striking the water, which would of course, cause her to rise more slowly.

For that matter, she might have been killed, or at all events, stunned, by a kick from her pony.

This thought flashed through Herbert's brain, as he darted forward, down stream, with powerful strokes, making calculations, as to the current, where the missing girl should be.

Just as he was about to dive, in frantic haste, the white face and golden hair slowly arose to the surface, within three feet of him; and, with a cry of joy, he grasped the maiden, and

with one arm about her waist, held her head above water, while he swam with the other arm.

Quickly he turned to the bank, and was rejoiced to discover a broken root, projecting from the same, near the water. This he clutched, casting his arm over it, and thus sustaining himself and his fair burden.

In a little time, Herbert was rejoiced to feel a shudder convulse the frame of the maiden, followed by a succession of gasps; then, slowly, her natural breath returned to her, and she opened her eyes, with a bewildered and startled expression.

This changed to one of terror, as she realized that she was in the river, and recalled her fearful plunge down the bank.

"Oh, save me! save me!"

Thus cried out poor Lulu Lindsay, before she perceived that some one was supporting her.

Her face, as she opened her eyes, was turned toward the river, over the broad water.

"Do not despair, miss, I will save you," said Herbert, in a hopeful voice. "If you will calm yourself, and do as I direct, we shall get out of this difficulty, safe and sound."

"I hope the pony did not injure you when you fell, or while in the water?"

Lulu, at this, turned her head, and recognized the face of the speaker, as that which she had seen on the bank when she and Blanco were falling; and she knew that she had been saved, a second time, by this noble-looking stranger.

She did not doubt, for a moment, that he could gain the upper bank with her. She had the utmost confidence in him. Her whole heart went out to him at first sight. His image, even when death seemed to have his icy hand upon her, being indelibly impressed upon her brain.

Filled with relief and gratitude, she whispered:

"I would that I could thank you! You have twice saved my life, for I believe that you will take me from this dreadful river. I have perfect confidence in you, and will do as you direct."

These words came in silvery tones from the lips of the young girl; the color returning meanwhile, to her fair face, deeper than usual, in a blush, as she realized that her arms were clasped around the neck of the young stranger.

The situation was, in itself, ample excuse for clinging to her preserver; yet she repented of the act, in her maiden modesty, though she still did not remove them for fear of giving offense.

"As to the thanks," said the young man, "I do not see that the occasion calls for any. And besides, we are not yet out of the woods. But, will you not favor me with your name, miss? Mine is Herbert Howard."

"And I am Lulu Lindsay. My home is but a short distance down the river."

"Well, Miss Lindsay, we are not in a very favorable position for conversation; and so, will launch down the river."

"It was very providential that this root was here; for I was so worried and excited at your deathlike state, that I became quite weak from anxiety. In such cases, one cannot do much."

"Place your right hand on the back of my neck, grasp my shirt-collar, and remain limp in the water; just keeping your head above the surface, by your hold upon me."

"Have no fears, whatever; and I will tow you to a point, where we can surmount the bank."

"This is no time for ceremony. Do you think you have the presence of mind, to do as I direct, and to maintain it for some time?"

"Yes, Mr. Howard; I think I can."

This was said, with a trusting smile, and without the least sign of fear.

"That is right," replied the young man. "You are a heroine, in every sense of the word. Here we go!"

Herbert struck out, down the stream, sustaining Lulu for a moment or two, until he saw that she was perfectly composed. Then he began swimming with both arms, the trusting girl clinging to him, as directed.

For a long distance, our hero swam on in this way, examining the bank. Neither he nor the maiden spoke a word, until they reached a point, where there was a small creek, which entered the river. During heavy rains the banks here were generally washed away.

Here, Herbert swam into the little cove, thus formed; and, a moment after, man and maid stood dripping on the upper bank.

Poor Lulu was very nervous, besides feeling greatly embarrassed at her forlorn condition. Her clothing was clinging to her form; and the long skirt of her riding-habit, having been dragged against the clay sides of the wash-out, was literally covered with mud.

"Are you afraid to remain here alone for a short time, Miss Lulu?" asked Herbert, as soon as he had assisted our heroine up the bank. "If you are not, I will run for my horse, and

carry you home. I see, by the hoof-marks in the clay, that your pony got out here also."

"Poor Blanco! I am so rejoiced that he has escaped. No, Mr. Howard, I am not afraid; but I think I can walk home."

"I wish you would try and call me Herbert," said the young man. "As to your walking home, that cannot be, if you feel ever so much like it."

"Just please move around here slightly, to prevent your contracting a cold, and I will soon rejoin you. Good-by until then!"

As the young man spoke he clasped Lulu impulsively in his arms, and was about to imprint a kiss upon her brow, when she guilelessly presented her lips, her eyes filled with the new-born love that now ruled her whole being.

Herbert quickly pressed his lips to hers, his soul in his eyes; then he strode up the river, disappearing in haste amid the undergrowth.

With clasped hands, the maiden paced back and forth, a few steps in distance, gazing skyward when turned toward the river, as if in gratitude; a happiness that was most heavenly being apparent in the depths of her eyes, her angelic face flushed and expressive of the same emotion.

In a very short time, although it seemed almost an age to the impatient girl, Herbert came dashing through the timber on his noble black; presenting a picture that would have drawn the attention and forced the admiration of a queen.

One glance into the face of Lulu Lindsay would have convinced any one of common perception that she had met her fate.

One glance into the face of Herbert Howard, as his eyes were bent upon the lovely girl before him, would have convinced even the most casual observer that the young man would die willingly to save her life—that he worshiped the very ground she walked upon. And all this within an hour!

It was a case of love at first sight on both sides.

Strangely had they been brought together. Strange, most strange, had been the circumstances and surroundings at their first passage of words.

But a short hour previous neither of them had known there was such a being as the other in existence; but now each was all in all to the other.

Remarkably strange it is, how a slight affair will change the whole course of one's life, rendering all the previously cherished and favorite plans, and aims, and hopes, as naught; and launching one upon a trail which he never had thought it possible he should traverse, and that had seemed either ridiculous or far beyond attainment.

Herbert dashed up to the side of Lulu, with a smile on his lips, that was full of deep meaning; and, bending over, clasped her around the waist, and drew her up into his arms.

Those two could have understood each other, betrayed each the love felt for the other, without the use of words.

As the black steed ambled through the bottom-timber, to the plain, volumes were spoken, through glances into each other's eyes. Clearly they understood each other.

The reader must bear in mind, that Lulu Lindsay had not had the benefit of a mother's training and counsel; and that she had never before met one who could compare, in the slightest degree, with Herbert Howard, either in beauty of form or face, or in the nobleness of character, so plainly manifest in him.

In addition to this, he had twice saved her life.

Besides, she had never mingled with the world.

Taking this all into consideration, it was not strange, that, in her guilelessness, Lulu made no effort to hide the love, which had sprung spontaneous into life, at her first meeting with him.

In a half hour more, the maiden was in her chamber, changing her wet robes, and the black horse was being attended to by Pomp.

Herbert was changing his clothes, in a chamber that had been assigned him; having taken his saddle-bags, containing dry clothing, up with him, for that purpose.

At the time of which we write, any stranger, when traveling, was always welcomed, and hospitably entertained, at any Southern plantation; and to offer payment for such entertainment, would have been considered an insult.

This fact, however, had nothing to do with our hero's acceptance of Miss Lindsay's invitation; for the young lady would listen to no refusal, and he wished to enjoy his new-found heavenly happiness as much as was possible, and when he could.

Besides this, each wished to learn more of the other, than the startling circumstances connected with their meeting, had permitted them to reveal.

In bringing this chapter to a close, we will mention, that Blanco galloped home, and was attended to by little Pomp; the pony's appearance, without his mistress having frightened the negroes greatly, many of whom, at the orders of the overseer, started in search of

Lulu, just as Herbert was discovered bringing her home in his arms.

All rained down blessings on the head of the strange young gentleman, when they were informed by their young mistress, that he had twice saved her life.

CHAPTER VII.

FLEEING FROM THE AVENGER.

It was a fearfully tragic scene, that within the apartment of Dolph Drake, who had acted his part as Count La Croix—a name to which he was, perhaps, as much entitled as that by which he was generally known—acted the part assigned him by Black Bill, with success, and then passed off this world's stage forever, rather than slay the man he had financially ruined!

All this degradation, misery, ruin, and crime had originated through Black Bill, who now lay as one dead; flat upon his back, legs and arms extended, his swarthy face of ashen hue, and his snake-like, treacherous eyes glassy as those of the corpse that lay near him—the corpse of his partner in the infamous plot to ruin an honest and honorable man.

There lay Adolphus Drake, his broad breast stained with his own heart's blood, which lay in a dark red pool upon the velvet carpet; the brilliant light from the wax candles showing the ghastly scene but too plain, in all its horrible details.

But the saddest, the most horrible sight of all, was the gray-haired planter himself.

It was one too dreadful to be looked upon by human eye.

To get but one glance at him, was to remember the sight until one's dying day.

There he stood, in the selfsame position that he had occupied when he jerked his bowie from the heart of his victim, and the so-called "count" fell prone to the floor, never to rise again!

With his arms half extended, the bloody bowie clutched in a vise-like grip, his form bent forward, his eyes fixed in a stony stare of the most agonizing horror, his face as colorless as that of the corpse at his feet, and his long gray hair in a wild and tangled state—thus stood Major Lindsay, as rigid and motionless as a statue of stone!

The face of Black Bill presented a picture of frozen, abject terror.

The handsome features of Dolph Drake wore a smiling and placid expression. Nothing except the glazed eyes caused one to turn away, in their admiration for that classic face, and broad, intellectual brow. It appeared almost, as though death had been welcome to the man, who had been called upon so suddenly to solve that great mystery—that his dying thought had been a pleasant one!

Thus this horrible scene remained, as described, for full five minutes. Then, as suddenly as his power of motion and action had been taken from him—as suddenly as he had become speechless, and powerless to move—Major Lindsay recovered; a most unearthly groan issuing from his lips.

He straightened himself erect, his nerves twitching spasmodically, shot a glance at the knife that was still in his hand; and dropped it, with a shudder, as if it had been a poisonous serpent.

Then, he gazed again at the corpse.

The next moment, as if suddenly recalling the near past, he jerked himself about, and fixing his eyes upon the senseless form of Black Bill, another hollow groan escaped him.

In another moment, he sunk in a heap on the floor; all his strength seeming to have left him in an instant. He lay, for some time, thus; then he crawled upon hands and knees, quivering in every portion of his frame, as if stricken with palsy, to the side of Black Bill.

Tremblingly, he grasped the wrist of the miscreant, and felt for the pulse; then a sigh, almost of relief burst from him.

A new idea seemed soon to strike the old man's tortured brain, and he clutched his bowie again, crawling back to the side of Bill.

There, he sat for a moment.

Then he raised the weapon, high in air, over the breast of the senseless plotter.

Again he seemed to be struck with a fresh idea, for he whirled about, and gazed toward the corpse, as if he feared that the dead would witness the deed he had contemplated, and be the means of betraying him.

The knife was lowered.

Black Bill, you will never know how near to death you were, when lying thus unconscious, and in the power of the man you terribly wronged.

Demoralized in mind as was the old major, he now reasoned, that possibly the young planter might be thought to be the murderer, should he be discovered in the apartment with the corpse.

This, perhaps, influenced him to spare the man's life—the life of the unprincipled wretch, who, he was now convinced, had inveigled him into the rooms of the "count," for the express purpose of ruining him.

Rising to his feet, with difficulty, the major staggered to the table, and poured out a brim-

ming glass of brandy; drinking it freely, as if it had been so much water. The fiery liquor—the prime cause of all the awful misery that must curse him in the days to come—was swallowed, without a thought of its most damning effects in the near past; an irresistible, burning, insane longing for it, banishing all else, for the moment, from his demoralized brain—even the presence of the corpse, on the floor near him.

Then, as the brandy coursed, like wildfire, through his veins, the old man regained somewhat his reasoning powers, and gazed more calmly at the body of "Count La Croix," noticing now, that he still clutched his knife, in the grip of death.

This fact cleared him from the crime of murder, should there be an investigation; but he felt that he would rather die than his connection with the fearful tragedy become known.

But a great shock awaited him. He noticed that the knife was in the left hand of the corpse; and he recalled the fact that he had seen the weapon changed, and the right fist drawn back to strike him. The "count" had not intended to kill him, but only to knock him senseless.

In his own mind Major Lindsay now felt that he was a dastardly murderer, and that came upon him like a flash, causing him to reel with faintness, and almost to fall upon the body of his victim.

He drank another glass of brandy, and strove to reason out a way of escape from the horrors around him; but escape would avail him nothing if he did not regain the notes and money that he had lost, for he would be irretrievably ruined.

Whither had the checks and money disappeared?

But a few moments had elapsed, after the showing of the four jacks by the "count," when he was back to the table, after having knocked down the man who called himself Lawrence Lane.

Yet in that little space the stakes had disappeared.

He believed Lane to be an impostor, and he again staggered to the side of the senseless man, and closely examined his features.

To his surprise, the major discovered that the imperial had dropped from Lane's chin to his bosom.

Might not the mustache be false also?

One twitch revealed a cleanly-shaved face—a face that he at once recognized as that of Bill Black, the dissolute son of a neighboring planter on the Trinity, a young man whom he had known for years, and who, in his estimation, had been a disreputable and unprincipled rascal always.

He now knew him to be a villain of the deepest dye.

Major Lindsay recalled the fact that he had threatened to let loose his hounds upon the young man if he ever again forced his company upon his daughter, and he understood now that Black had plotted with the "count" to ruin him from motives of revenge.

Greatly relieved was the old planter, that he had not slain Black, for the father of the latter was his neighbor and an honest man, although dissipated.

The brandy had blurred and benumbed the brain of the old man, and the enormity of his crime was not revealed for the time being.

All his mind was bent upon extricating himself from his present horrible position, yet he dared not venture to return to his room at the Island City Hotel.

Such a course might direct suspicion toward him when the murder should be discovered.

Yet he might fly from this accursed house and secrete himself somewhere until the steamer went up the Bayou to Houston. But how was he to meet Lulu, and be a ruined man?

He feared to stop the payment of the checks, as that would be proof positive of his connection with the murder.

But where were the checks?

This was the mystery.

Repulsive as it was, he must search the corpse.

Did he not do so, and the papers should be found upon the body, he was lost.

Even were they found among the effects of the deceased he would be arrested, probably, for murder.

There had been no witnesses to the deed, it was true, but this villain, Black, would give evidence that would be sufficient to fasten the murder upon him. Besides, the checks would prove his motive in committing it.

Black, however, would not dare come forward and testify.

Black would fly, as soon as he recovered.

There could be no doubt about that.

But the papers—these must be found, or he was both ruined and lost!

Hastily pouring down another drink, the old major quickly examined the pockets of the corpse.

There were neither checks nor money, upon the body of "Count La Croix!"

Great beads of perspiration stood upon the forehead of the old man.

All at once, an idea occurred to him.

He bent up the arm of the corpse, the hand

of which clutched the knife, and ran the blade into the wound in the breast of the "count." He then returned the arm to the same position.

The body had not, as yet, stiffened.

The blade was now blood-stained.

One word, the old planter gasped out:

"SUICIDE!"

A heavy groan, at this moment, burst from the lips of Black Bill, which nearly caused Major Lindsay to shriek with deathly terror, as he sprang like a panther over the corpse.

The wretch, upon the floor, was reviving.

There was no time to lose!

If Bill Black found him there when he returned to consciousness, all was lost.

All further search must be abandoned.

It was now simply a question of life or death.

Clutching the brandy bottle, Major Lindsay stole to the door, drew the bolt, opened it noiselessly, and passed out, closing the door after him.

It was a new departure for him. A strange departure, truly, for one so honorable and open, in all things, as Major Lindsay!

Passing down a flight of stairs, he unbolted the outer back door, and then passed through a yard and gateway. Thus he reached the street.

Down this, the old man ran through the darkness, as though the fiends were at his heels; stopping only when out of breath, to drink heavily from the bottle which he carried with him.

In half an hour more, the old planter was far from the suburbs of the city, on the south side; running bare-headed along the Strand, and shrieking out, in his insane terror.

On sped the wretched and much-wronged man, imagining every moment that the sigh of the wind, and the ripple of the waves of the incoming tide were the exultant whispers and laughter of countless demons, rejoicing at his fearful downfall!

CHAPTER VIII.

DEVIL DICK.

WHEN Herbert Howard had completed his toilet, he presented a more striking and impressive appearance than previous to his plunge into the water.

His suit of soft-tanned buckskin, of Mexican make, fitted his fine form to perfection, and was one that could be packed without wrinkling.

A red silk sash was about his waist, as well as his belt of arms.

His long, wavy hair, was combed out free; and, thus changed in "make-up," he descended hat in hand, to the veranda. Pomp had conveyed the young stranger's wet clothing to Aunt Huld, to dry by the huge fire-place in the kitchen cabin.

As he paced back and forth on the veranda, Herbert Howard was a perfect picture of manly beauty; his handsome face, and free, open glance of eye indicating all that is noble, and true, and brave—an honest man!

Looking out over the broad vista of cultivated fields, that ranged along the bottom-lands, the beautiful gardens that surrounded the mansion, and the towering wall of timber near at hand, together with the appointments of the dwelling as seen through the open windows; Herbert was forced to admit that the Bayou Plantation was a most befitting place of residence, even for the angelic maiden whom he had met, and whom he had been instrumental in saving from death.

But all the artistic beauties of the vista were instantly forgotten, as Lulu Lindsay advanced from the grand old hall to greet him; attired as we first saw her, when she threw herself in her hammock, to peruse her book, in her loneliness.

Neither of them could speak a word.

Herbert advanced, throwing his sombrero into the hammock as he passed the same, and extending both hands; a smile on his lips, and unspeakable love in his eyes as he met those of Lulu.

He then drew the arm of the maiden within his own, and the two paced up and down the veranda for a few moments, too full of their own thoughts, their new and heretofore undreamed-of happiness, to break in upon it with idle words.

At length Herbert spoke:

"Miss Lulu, I presume that you have a curiosity to know who and what I am? A few words will explain all.

"My father is a planter, on the bayou below Houston on the south side; and I have often heard him speak of Major Lindsay. I frequently take long trips alone, hunting and fishing, camping out, on such occasions, for I enjoy the works of nature.

"Indeed, I am happier alone, in the woods, than in society. I ought rather to say that I have been so; for I apprehend that state of mind will no longer be mine—that I shall never again know happiness, unless in your company, or when near you!"

Here the young girl bent her eyes to the floor.

Herbert continued:

"I have been up the Trinity for several days, and was about to turn toward Houston and

home, when I providentially caught sight of you for the first time. I thought, at the first, it was a vision of my imagination. Do not take me for a flatterer, for I am not such. I speak out what I honestly think and believe, and you must pardon it.

"You know the rest, and, Lulu, I here confess, affirm, yes, swear, that I love you more than all the world. If this be too abrupt, forgive it.

"Although but a few short hours ago we had never met, nor known each other, I feel that our lives are fated to be linked together, for good or evil. I cannot pretend to prophesy, but let us think and believe, for good.

"Lulu Lindsay, what have you to say to my free, outspoken avowal of love?"

The answer of the maiden was not in words, but a joy shot from eye to eye, that was too pure, too intense, too heavenly for earth—or, at least, to last for any length of time.

The song of birds sounded more sweetly to them now than ever before, the flowers seemed more brilliant in hue, and everything was in harmony with their great happiness and love.

Lulu now stated the fact that her father had gone to Galveston, and then, although it gave her great pain and humiliation to do so, she confided to Herbert her father's weakness, and her own dread that he might yield again to temptation.

She explained that she had been troubled with dreams and forebodings in connection with her father, which had greatly worried her, although she had endeavored to throw such thoughts aside, as idle, foolish, and superstitious.

The young man was full of sympathy, reasoning against such fears of danger, and assuring Lulu that the major would, without doubt, return safe and sound in his own good time.

For a long time they thus conversed, the time going on angel's wings, until they were summoned to dinner. Aunt Huld had done her best to please the handsome and gallant stranger, who had, as she expressed it:

"Done sabe de young missus from de ole painter, an' snatched her outen de ribber sides!"

After the meal, and a brief consultation between Herbert and Lulu, in regard to the former's making a trip to Galveston, should Major Lindsay not return home at the appointed time, the latter, wishing to have Herbert trace her father, and guard him, should he be intoxicated—after this, our hero, very considerably, decided to return up the river, to secure his rifle which he had secreted, and also to remove the skin of the panther, which he wished to preserve in commemoration of his meeting with his fate, and the peril she had escaped.

This would leave Lulu at leisure to take an after dinner siesta, which she stood much in need of; and, agreeably to orders, Pomp saddled the horse of the young stranger, and the latter rode off down the broad drive, swinging his sombrero above his head, in parting salutation to Lulu Lindsay, who stood upon the veranda.

A fine sight it was to see Herbert Howard thus, on his superb steed—Black Cloud, as he had named it—speeding like the wind; a picture of grace and beauty that would have extorted admiration anywhere.

Soon our hero was lost to view, as he passed beyond the cotton and corn-fields; and then west, up the river, parallel with the timber.

The young girl now reclined in her hammock, and gave herself up to pleasant musings. A new world, as it were, had opened to her—a most heavenly world—through her new-born love, and the knowledge that she was loved in return.

Thus musing, and much fatigued from her terrible experiences, Lulu Lindsay fell asleep, and reveled in blissful dreams.

Herbert had promised to return by sunset, and pass the night at Bayou Plantation.

When the rifle of the young man had rung through the bottom timber, the report was heard by other ears than those of Lulu and our hero.

A man in the thicket, not a pistol-shot in distance from the tree in which the panther had crouched, sprang to his feet, awakened by the sound, from a deep sleep.

He was a most ruffianly-looking specimen of humanity; clothed in soiled and ragged habiliments, and with a beard of at least two weeks' growth covering his crime-marked face.

His eyes were wild and bloodshot, and he trembled as he sprang erect—a haunted look being in his rolling orbs.

He was of medium height, and seeming great muscular strength; his only arm being a huge bowie.

Any Texan, discovering him, would at once decide that he was a horse-thief, or one guilty of a more capital crime, and in hiding.

His appearance would, at once, create aversion.

As has been mentioned, this ruffian sprang to his feet, as the report of the rifle broke upon the air.

He stood thus, like a hunted beast at bay, until the shrieks of Lulu met his ears; when

a relieved expression overspread his brutal visage.

Groping among the leaves near him, he now produced a black bottle, the neck of which he glued to his lips. Picking up his tattered hat, he next jammed that upon his head, and started in the direction of the sounds that he had heard.

He arrived in time to see Herbert swimming, with Lulu, to the projecting root.

Lucky it was for our hero, that he did not cast his belt of arms aside, until at the very edge of the steep bank. Had he done otherwise, he would never have seen them again.

The ruffian, however, did not go beyond the horse, being apprehensive of the return of the owner at any moment; for he believed that the young man would soon reach a point, from which he could gain, without much difficulty, the upper bank.

Stealthily secreting himself he now awaited developments, and when Herbert returned for his horse and arms, concealing his rifle in a hollow tree, the eyes of the lurker fairly glittered.

Very cunning he was, for he stole from the vicinity and ran like a deer down the stream, until he reached a point where he saw Herbert galloping off with Lulu toward the plain.

Returning to where the panther lay, the sneaking spy secured the stranger's rifle and again hid himself, his face showing not only satisfaction, but a fiendish thirst for blood.

The ruffian was an outlaw, and in the pay of Black Bill.

He was known as "Devil Dick," and was "wanted" by the *Vigilantes* of various counties for horse-stealing and murder. Through him Black Bill had learned of the departure of Major Lindsay for Galveston, and had thus been prepared to work the old man's ruin, having long waited for the opportunity.

And now Devil Dick had fresh news for his employer.

He knew that Bill had sworn to conquer and enslave Lulu Lindsay, and he knew all the circumstances from which that villain's hatred for the Lindsays sprang. What he had now seen convinced him of the maiden's interest in another.

Crouching in the thicket, Devil Dick awaited the return of the stranger, who, he realized, was destined to interfere with the plans of Black Bill in securing Lulu Lindsay as a victim to his revenge and fiendish passion.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCEALING THE CRIME.

MAJOR LINDSAY had not reached the outer gate of the yard before Black Bill arose to a sitting posture; but his brain was in a whirl, the lights and every object in the room were dancing and spinning before his eyes, and he was forced to sink back again on the floor.

For his life he could not tell where he was, or what had occurred to him, and he pressed his aching brow with his hot palms, striving to recall the near past. But all in vain; the terrible blow he had received had given his brain a great shock.

Placing his hand on one side of his head he found it fearfully swollen. What had occasioned that he did not know, neither could he decide where he was.

His first reasonings were in every way disconnected. At length he decided that he must have been very drunk, had fallen against some hard substance, been found senseless by his friends and placed indoors in a safe place.

He closed his eyes, for the bright light tortured them. The blood was shooting through his veins with great velocity, and his throat, tongue and lips were parched with thirst.

As time passed, this thirst became unendurable, and he summoned all his strength and again partly arose, gazing around him in bewilderment, everything still in a whirl.

He was forced to place a hand on the floor on either side to maintain his position; but, suddenly looking upward, he caught sight of some carved Cupids in black walnut.

Anything of human form had, at this time, great interest for him.

He froze his eyes upon these images, as they seemed to move about in the air; and, at length, recalled where he had seen them before.

They were on the top of the side-board, in Dolph Drake's private sitting-room.

This he became fully decided upon.

He had been taken care of then by Dolph; but where was his friend, and why had he not placed him on a bed?

He now became insanely eager for a drink; and, from the fact that he knew liquors to be within a few feet of him, he became desperate, and gathered all his strength, in an endeavor to crawl toward the side-board.

After many trials he succeeded in getting upon his hands and knees; and, in this way, he crawled slowly over the carpet, gazing directly downward, in order to maintain his position.

In this manner Bill made his way straight toward the corpse of Dolph Drake.

For one instant, nothing except the crimson carpet met the view of Black Bill; the next, the marble-like face of his partner in the infamous plot was directly beneath his own—the

set, frozen, soulless eyes fixed in a stony stare upon his own. At the same moment his hand pressed into a pool of cold, coagulated gore!

With a shriek of horror, the villain sprang backward, standing an instant upon his feet; his arms outstretched, as if to ward off fiends that were striving to clutch him. His eyes were glued upon the dead face of Dolph Drake, and his face contorted most horribly.

Then he threw up his arms, and fell backward heavily to the floor, as devoid of sense as the slain gambler before him!

For full fifteen minutes Black Bill lay thus, when again his senses partially returned; and he, with his first consciousness, realizing that something terrible had occurred, braced himself as before, and gazed again in front of him.

There lay his dead pard, the ghastly face appearing more so in the brilliant light of the wax candles; the glazed eyes, in the imagination of Bill, being filled with a strong rebuke and bitter condemnation. But for what?

The wretch stood erect, in the intensity of his feeling in connection with the tragic scene. Then he tottered to the side-board, and poured out a full goblet of brandy. This he swallowed hastily, but still stood trembling in every nerve.

So appalled had he been at the sight of the dead face of his comrade, that he had not noticed that he had placed his hand in the pool of blood.

Shuddering from head to foot, half-believing that he must have murdered his friend, and not able to reason out past events, he desperately grasped another glass, filled it to the brim with brandy, and clutching it with his unstained hand, bent forward to favor the passage of the tumbler to his lips, and drank the liquor to the last drop. Then he turned, leaning against the side-board, and stood gazing upon the dead, with an indescribable expression upon his swarthy face, now perfectly ashen in its hue.

Soon the fiery liquor began to affect both blood and brain, clearing his mind, and bracing his nerves into something like self-control.

Then he reeled across the room to a wash-stand, and bathed his hand, freeing the same from blood; and afterward his face, drying it hastily.

Turning about, Bill uttered one exclamation; a world of meaning in the words.

"Great God!"

Then, striding across the room once again, he helped himself to more brandy.

His step was now firm, in comparison with what he had been but a few moments before, and his brain much clearer.

He now approached the side of the corpse, sunk on one knee, and placed his hand on the cold cheek.

"What, in the fiend's name, does this mean?"

Thus asked Bill, in low soliloquy; his voice so hoarse and unnatural, that he started at it himself, and gazed in the direction of the adjoining bed-chamber.

This gave him an idea, and he rushed toward it; drawing a revolver, and cocking it.

Bill searched the bed-room, but without finding the man whom he had reason to suspect might be concealed there. He then returned to the corpse.

Now he noticed that the gambler clutched his knife in the death grip, and that the blade was stained with blood. Was it his own blood, or the blood of Major Lindsay?

Had he gotten drunk, in his exultation over winning such a vast fortune, and then committed suicide?

Either Dolph had killed himself, or he had been slain by the old planter; who had himself received a serious, perhaps fatal wound in the fight.

These questions Bill asked himself mentally.

Then he thought of the enormous winnings of Dolph, one third of which was to have been his; and he wondered if the major had recovered it, and departed.

If so, all the plot had been as nothing; and he had been the means of the violent death of his pard.

Then he recalled the fact, that he had seen the gambler thrust his winnings into a secret drawer, in the side-board. Breaking this open, he saw before him a fortune in money; to say nothing of valuable papers, which, if he could only negotiate, revenge would be his, to its fullest extent.

If Major Lindsay had stopped payment of the checks, however, all that was lost!

He must forge Dolph's name on all the papers.

He must do this at once, and then fly, before the murder should be discovered.

Major Lindsay, had, doubtless, fled to unknown parts.

Against him there were no witnesses.

His rage now knew no bounds, as he recalled the fact that the major had knocked him down, and he walked to the mirror, to examine his head.

Then he noticed that his mustache and imperial were missing, and he turned a shade paler. The old planter must have removed them, and had therefore recognized him. Clearly, now, he must fly!

Henceforth, he must be an outlaw, unless he could kill the major, before the latter reached the Trinity.

Again Black Bill helped himself to liquor, and reasoned further upon the situation.

Dolph Drake had been in the habit of making flying visits to the neighboring cities, without informing any one of his intentions. This was fortunate, for it would probably be some days before the death of the sport would be discovered.

In the mean time, he could work out his plans.

One thing was certain; Major Lindsay must be removed.

That settled, Black Bill's revenge upon the daughter was easy enough of accomplishment.

He had sworn to have revenge, and he would keep his oath, to the letter.

From the way in which events were shaping themselves, he would be forced into outlawry; and he cared very little if he was.

A fortune was his, if he but played his cards right.

The checks must first be cashed; and then, he must hunt for Major Lindsay, who could not have left Galveston as yet. First, then, to forge Drake's indorsement.

Opening the shutters, and finding that day was breaking, Bill decided to extinguish the candles.

Then the idea occurred to him to fire the house, and destroy all evidence of a crime having been committed.

He would swear that he had won the checks from Dolph, on the evening previous to the fire.

The future had no opening for him to lead an honest life, after glutting his revenge, and he cared not.

He was desperate, merciless; and he would soon have a fortune at his control, if all went well.

The house must burn!

Without a thought of him who lay dead, and whose life had been lost in a plot of his forming—without a thought of the man, who, although a gambler by profession, was a saint in comparison with himself, Bill placed all the wax candles in a heap by the side of the corpse; all still ablaze.

He then stole out into the darkness, down the southerly running streets, toward the Strand; carrying with him a bottle; which was all that remained of the establishment of Dolph Drake, alias Count La Croix.

When Black Bill had reached the limits of the city, southward, and gained the beach, he halted, and gazed back.

The work had been begun.

Great forks of red flame were shooting up into the dark sky, illuminating the fair Island City, and soon, on the silence that greeted the early dawn, rung out the wild cry:

"Fire! Fire!! Fire!!!"

CHAPTER X.

"DEAD, FOR A DUCAT, DEAD!"

DEVIL DICK had to wait a longer time than he anticipated for the return of Herbert Howard for his rifle.

As time passed the ruffian became more and more furious, and had frequent recourse to his whisky-bottle.

This inflamed his brain, increasing his rage, and bringing to the front the murderous madness that had, in days past, caused him to commit the most cowardly crimes.

From long pondering upon the nature of his last discovery, he decided that the man who had shot the panther and twice saved the daughter of Major Lindsay from death would command that young lady's affection, and prove a most dangerous enemy to all who in any way injured her or her father.

He saw, too, that the young stranger was both brave and powerful, and that he would prove a most bitter and dangerous foe. Therefore, the drunken wretch soon became insanely eager for the blood of the man who, he feared, would work him and his employer harm in the future—perhaps cause him to be lynched.

Aside from this, Devil Dick coveted the horse and arms of Herb Howard.

He had decided to go to Houston and drop a line to Black Bill, in regard to its being a good opportunity to abduct Lulu Lindsay; and it might be that he would receive a letter from his employer, who, doubtless, had accomplished something toward avenging himself upon the old major.

But to go to Houston he must have a horse, and he could, the coming night, make the trip on this stranger's black steed, secrete the animal in the shed of a "pal," whom he had in his mind's eye, and on the following night make his way back.

He would then allow the horse to go free, as it was one that would be dangerous to be found in possession of without being able to show from whom it had been purchased.

He was too well known already, and it would not do to risk himself on such a valuable animal.

He could shoot this stranger, rob him, and

then hurl him into the river. If the body were not devoured by alligators, it would be washed down to Galveston Bay, and no one would ever know what had become of the interloper. Devil Dick evolved these thoughts in his enraged mind, and swore by all the fiends that the stranger should die.

The dinner-hour at Bayou Plantation was, as a general thing, at two o'clock; but the necessary delay consequent upon the condition of Lulu upon her return, had forced Aunt Huldry to postpone the meal an hour later.

The youthful pair had remained at table fully an hour in conversation, after the servants had been dismissed, and during this time Lulu mentioned to Herbert the proposal of marriage that had been made to her by William Black, her indignant refusal, and her father's terrible anger.

She also told Herbert of Black's furious anger and oath of vengeance, and explained that the remembrance of this fearful threat had caused her great worry of mind in regard to her father's safety in Galveston, especially should he be tempted to indulge in drink and meet Black when intoxicated. This was her great fear.

The young man, who knew Black by sight, as well as by reputation, assured her that he would keep an eye on that worthy; and that he would be lynched at once if he attempted to keep his oath in regard to shooting the major.

But notwithstanding this, when our hero had cleared the fields on his way after the gun and the panther-skin, he drew rein, and with a troubled and anxious look upon his handsome face, pondered deeply upon what had been told him by Lulu—allowing his horse free rein at a walk.

He knew that Black Bill was a most unscrupulous villain, who would commit any crime could he do it in a secret manner, and that could not be proved against him. It was torture to Herbert to think for a moment that such a man as Black Bill had dared to offer his hand to such a superior being as Lulu Lindsay.

He felt that Lulu was his, and his alone; that fate had ordained they should meet in a most strange manner, and to love each other from the first moment of their meeting.

The oath of Black Bill troubled Herbert greatly, for he knew that a coward was to be feared—a brave man, never!

He was aware that Bill had been in Galveston a short time before he himself had started on his hunting-trip, for he had overheard a man state so at the hotel in Houston.

Probably he was still in the Island City, and if so, might work harm to Major Lindsay.

Again, he might in the course of time seek to abduct Lulu!

The latter had stated that Bill had sworn a fearful oath that she should yet beg and sue to him for favor.

What could this mean, unless the miscreant intended to first tear her from her home?

The more Herbert reflected upon the subject, the more enraged he became against Black, for causing this lovely girl unhappiness, and the more apprehensive he became in regard to the future.

If the scoundrel really intended mischief—if he intended to abduct Lulu, he would carry out his plans at once, if he should become aware that she had an accepted lover. He felt that he and Black Bill were henceforth bitter foes—foes to the death!

It was probable that the miscreant would seek his life, and in some cowardly manner. He therefore vowed that he would start the ball himself, by putting himself in the path of Bill, and giving the latter a chance to insult him.

Then, of course, a challenge would follow, and Herbert felt confident that he could, in the duello, rid the earth of the dastardly insulter of Lulu Lindsay.

So deeply was our hero engaged in thoughts such as have been mentioned, that several times Black Cloud stopped to tear the rich rank grass from the sod, his master being ignorant of the halt.

This slow progress occupied much time in reaching a point on the plain in a line with a place in the timber where the panther had been shot; and the sun's disk seemed to rest upon the western horizon line, when Herbert Howard turned into the dark shades of the Rio Trinity bottom and proceeded toward the river.

The farther he penetrated the darker it became, but the young man remembered that there was a full, round moon to illumine the earth when the sun should disappear, and by the light of this he could return to Bayou Plantation, as he had promised Lulu he would do.

The maiden would doubtless be much concerned even if he should be late in returning.

This caused Herbert to urge his faithful steed along the cow-path in the semi-darkness; our hero realizing that he had come at a very slow pace, and wasted much time in his meditations.

Rather than be the occasion of the least anxiety to the lovely creature who was so dear to him—in fact, as it now seemed, necessary to his very existence; although he had known her

but a few short hours—rather than cause her one unhappy thought, he felt that he would rather lose his right arm. He would, therefore, skin the panther in a hasty manner, recover his rifle, and return to the plantation at a gallop.

Soon the young man saw a brightening a little distance ahead, and in a few moments he had reached the point where lay the panther; it being so near the river, that it was sufficiently light for his purpose.

Dismounting and securing Black Cloud—for he thought that possibly the panther's mate might be in the vicinity, and frighten the horse—Herbert drew his knife and began skinning the dead beast that he had shot, it being the means of his having formed the acquaintance and gained the love of Lulu Lindsay.

Still intent upon thoughts of Black Bill's oath of vengeance, the young man as he worked did not notice that Black Cloud was very uneasy, appearing to scent danger. At last, the animal commenced to snort, and prance around the tree to which he had been secured.

Then Herbert stood erect, thinking that the mate of the panther was really in the near vicinity, and resolved to get his rifle and prepare for the beast; but at that very instant, a spurt of flame burst from out a dark thicket near at hand—a thunderous report breaking upon the evening air, and reverberating through the shades. The form of Herbert Howard fell across the carcass of the dead panther—silent and motionless as the beast itself!

Then, as Black Cloud snorted and plunged frantically, out from the thicket strode Devil Dick, his hideous face fairly beaming with exultation, the smoking rifle in his left hand, and the bowie in his right, to make sure that his bullet had gone to the mark.

Paying no attention to the frantic horse, except to glance at the neck-ropes and note the strength of it, Devil Dick hastened to the side of his victim, casting the rifle to the earth.

The miscreant saw that he had no need of his knife. His work had been but too well done!

Quickly unclasping the belt of arms from the waist of the prostrate man, and abstracting a wallet from one of the pockets, Devil Dick gave a whistle of intense satisfaction; proceeding to celebrate his success by taking a drink from the bottle that he had left in the thicket.

The face of the assassin was perfectly fiendish, as he returned; stopping twice on the way, to listen intently, and to sweep the surroundings with a glance of suspicion, clutching at one of the revolvers he had taken from his victim.

He heard nothing, however, that would indicate the near presence of human beings, and he strode again to the side of the fallen man; casting his own tattered hat to the ground, and replacing it with Herbert's sombrero, laughing, as he did so, in devilish glee.

Stooping next, he brought all his strength to bear, lifted the senseless body in his arms, and advanced with it to the edge of the high river-bank.

The next moment, with a herculean effort, the cowardly assassin hurled the seeming corpse over the bank, and the apparently dead Herbert Howard shot down into the inky waters.

The body disappeared, with a far-sounding plunge, and spattering of the water on every side, beneath the surface of the Rio Trinity!

CHAPTER XI.

MEETING WITH THE MANIAC.

BLACK BILL stood upon the hard, smooth sands of the Strand, and gazed back on the city, now illumined by the horrid glare of the conflagration.

He felt safe. It might be days before the bones of Dolph Drake were discovered among the debris; and the knife, if found at all, would not create any suspicions.

As to the fire being extinguished, that would be impossible, as the building was a frail structure of wood, and there was no water supply, except in the huge cisterns at the rear of each house; the inhabitants of Galveston depending entirely upon the rains which fell upon the roofs for their water.

Luckily, the house stood detached, and there being no wind, no other dwelling was in danger.

Thus Black Bill reasoned, as he stood on the Strand, watching the blaze; and wondering where his comrades now were, whom he had given the "slip" at the lumber yard, a few hours before.

He still clutched the brandy bottle, and he knew that he had already drunk so much, in his excited state, that it would be impossible for him to stop—that he could not control his appetite—and he resolved that he would get the checks cashed, and dispose of the cotton orders, before he became incapable of attending to business.

He recalled the fact that there was an old Jew broker, who lived in the suburbs of the city, with whom he had had several money transactions; as had also Dolph Drake.

This Jew was an unscrupulous villain, and was reputed to have untold wealth at his command.

There was no doubt that he would purchase

the checks and orders, if there was sufficient discount allowed; and Bill felt willing to sacrifice a large amount to get rid of the paper, and insure the ruin of Major Lindsay.

As far as the major was concerned, personally, he was already ruined; for, Bill was persuaded that the old planter must have killed Dolph Drake, and then fled. If this were so, he would not dare show his face in Galveston.

Not only this; but the major had started out on a terrible spree, was insane with drink, and this would inevitably end in "jim-jams."

As this idea struck Bill, he received a great shock; for it now occurred to him, that Major Lindsay, being drunk, would not practice any caution, but might, in his madness, disclose the whole thing.

If he had any sense remaining, he must have known, as he left the house, that he had been in the rooms of Dolph Drake; and that it was none other than that well-known gambler, whom he had slain in the knife encounter.

These reflections fairly caused Black Bill to shudder from head to heel, and he was forced to take another drink, to keep up his nerve.

There was, by this time, a perfect hubbub in the city, and Bill resolved that he would visit the Jew broker, as it was a very favorable time to do so.

He started at once, soon reaching the miserable dwelling that was occupied by the old broker and note-shaver.

Knocking loudly at the door, Bill, with nervous haste, put his brandy bottle down at the corner of the steps, and the next moment a voice reached his ears, from the interior—the voice of the German Jew.

"Vot you wants, eh? Who vos dot at mine toor, dis time on de ni-ght?"

"It's me, old man—William Black—and I'm going to give you a chance for a big thing—the best you have ever had in your miserable life!"

"Pill Plack?" returned the Jew, hesitatingly and ponderingly. "A—a—ah, ha! Ya—a—as; I dinks I vos be acquainted mit you, my poy! Dot vos all ri-ght. I opens dot toor ri-ght away."

Then followed a sound of bars being removed, and the door opened slowly, for a foot, or little more, the Jew peeping out to assure himself there was no one but the man who had spoken.

But he had no time for inspection. Bill pressed himself quickly in, saying:

"Don't be a fool, Jake! You have known me for years, and have made ducats enough out of me, in all conscience. Come back into your den! I have a big thing, I assure you."

"So-o-o, so-o-o-o?" said the Jew, doubtfully.

"Well, I reckon you'll admit it, when I show up."

A moment after, the two were seated, on either side of a rickety table, in a most filthy room; that was filled with the smell of broiled herring and ancient cheese, to that extent that Bill felt sick for a time. But he immediately opened the subject, and explained the object of his visit.

"Jake, you know, I suppose, that I play cards pretty extensively at times?"

"Ya-as; I vos know dot long dimes."

"What would you say, if I told you that I won two hundred and forty thousand dollars yesterday?"

"Gott in himmell!" exclaimed Jake, raising his hands. "I don't vos believes dot, Pill! You vos shoking mit old Shake, don't it?"

"It's a solid fact! And I want to negotiate the paper. Do you know Colonel Lindsay, a rich old planter on the Rio Trinity?"

"Ya-as; I vos hear about him somedimes. Dot vos all, I dinks."

"You know Dolph Drake, the gambler?"

"Ya-as; und he vos von shentlemans. I vos likes him burty vell!"

"That's all right then! Now, understand me—Dolph won all the loose ducats from the old major, and his cotton crop too, with all his niggers, except the house servants. Now, here are the papers. Examine them for yourself, Jake!"

"I won them all from Dolph Drake, and his indorsement is O. K."

"I want you to run them through, and I'll give you forty thousand dollars. That will leave me two hundred thousand. What do you think of that, old man? A big thing, isn't it?"

"Sherusalem!" hissed out old Jake, his eyes bulging from their sockets, and his hands extended in air. "You dakes mine preath away mit me! Vot you dinks? Dot old Shake got two hunder t'ousan' tollars! Gott in himmell! hear dot poy talk!"

"Examine those papers. See if they are not all right, and give me fifty thousand dollars now. I will leave the balance in your hands for collection. You can get one hundred thousand from the bank on these checks tomorrow. Secure the cotton and negroes at once, and levy on the estate!"

"Hold the one hundred and fifty thousand ready to my order here. Don't deposit it, and whatever outside talk you hear, don't let it interfere with the business between us. Keep the forty thousand for yourself, as I said in the beginning."

"These are plain words, and easily understood."

"Do you accept the bargain? Will you push the whole business through at once?"

The Jew had, with trembling hands, adjusted his spectacles, and examined the papers, but had not lost a word that Bill spoke, and when the latter had finished he sprung to his feet, exclaiming:

"Holy Moshes! I does it, mine poy! I givs you fifty t'ousan' tollars, und hold dot palance ondl you comes for dot same. Dose babers vos all ri-ught."

"I goes for dot machor on dot Drinidy rifer, und dakes dose nickers und gotton—you see. Dot vos all ri-ught, mine poy!"

Jake for once had lost all control of himself.

He was trembling with joy at the sure prospect of clearing in a few days forty thousand dollars, and he hastened to one side of the room, tore away some old ragged quilts, and disclosed a safe.

Inserting a peculiar key, Jake soon opened the door, and brought out a square tin box, fastened with a brass padlock. Opening this, he produced several packages of bank notes of large denominations, the amount of each being marked upon the band of white paper which was pasted around them.

These were now laid upon the table, Jake counting out eagerly, and in great excitement, the fifty thousand dollars that had been requested by Black Bill.

The latter was now almost insane with exultation.

He knew that the Jew would secure the cotton and negroes, and levy on the plantation of Major Lindsay.

He had, already, over forty thousand dollars in cash, that had been staked at the start of the game of poker, and this, with what the Jew was now advancing, would foot up to nearly one hundred thousand dollars.

"I can't stop to open and count it, Jake," said Bill; "I reckon it's all right. The notes and checks are made out to order, as you see, and need no other indorsement. Carry out the bill to the letter, old man! You'll see me again soon."

As he spoke, Bill arose from the table, thrust the bundles of bank notes into his pockets, and started for the door.

"Gott in Himmel, mine poy! You comes to see old Shake ag'in, soon quick!"

"You won't have any cause to weep, if I never come, Jake! My advice to you, is to hire some Greaser to follow my trail, and perforate my pericardium with his stiletto. Then you'll be one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in!"

"Sherusalem! Pill, my poy, you vos shokes mit old Shake. Py tam, dot vos goot—dot vos goot!"

"You dinks I vos Gaptain Gid, vot vos von birate. Yahl dot vos goot. I bay dot Creaser to berforade your berrygardium? I dinks dot over, mineself!"

Before old Jake had gotten half through with this, Black Bill had disappeared, with his bottle of brandy, in the semi-darkness, in the direction of the lumber-yard. He paused, however, before he had gone ten yards, to glue the mouth of the bottle again to his lips.

It had been a great strain upon the brain of Black Bill, and brought into play all his will power, to maintain a semblance of sobriety, and crowd down the intense excitement occasioned by the tragic occurrences of the night. Besides this, his terrible thirst for strong drink, now thoroughly aroused, caused him the extreme of torture.

For the present, however, he had the liquor on hand.

Nothing but a lurid glow was, by this time, to be seen, where but recently the flames had shot upward; and Bill was confident, that the house which had been rented by Adolphus Drake had been burned to the ground, and that only the charred bones of his Apollo-like sporting pard remained—and these, buried among the smoldering embers.

The confusion and yells had ceased, and all was once more silent in the Island City.

The gray streaks of coming morn shot up to the eastward, over the sea line.

The breast of the successful schemer was filled with most intense satisfaction.

He had a fortune upon his person, and had in addition, insured the ruin of the man who had so grossly insulted him, and driven him from his doors, for presuming to love his daughter, and to tell him so.

That daughter had rejected his proposal—the suit of him, the son of an honorable and well-to-do neighbor, of the proud patrician stock of Louisiana.

For this, he had sworn revenge on both; and, in a measure that revenge was now his. But, even were his plans carried out to the very letter, not sufficient was it yet to cover his fancied wrongs.

Thus the miscreant reasoned, in his vile, corrupt mind; then his thoughts reverted to the late happenings, and he ground his teeth, with the most intense fury, his swarthy features

scarcely recognizable in his fiendish hate and longing for revenge, as he recalled the fact that he had been struck—felled to the floor senseless, by the old planter!

For this, and to silence his testimony forever, Black Bill swore that Major Lindsay should die!

If he was to be outlawed, there should be good and sufficient reasons for it.

He would be ruined if the major disclosed his connection with the plot against him. The finger of scorn would be pointed at him, and all men would avoid his company.

So demoralized was the villain's mind, that he could no longer reason clearly. He failed to perceive that no positive proof could be brought against him, except the ravings of a drunken man, who would himself be a confessed homicide.

Thus Bill reached the lumber-yard in a frenzy of fury, halting near some high piles of boards, where he again imbibed freely from his brandy bottle; failing to see a human being, between the lumber piles.

There, crawling upon hands and knees, his gray hair hanging in tangled masses about his haggard cheeks, his eyes wild as those of an infuriated tiger, his clothing torn and soiled—there, stealthily creeping toward Black Bill, with beast-like caution and intent, was Major Lindsay. His one grand object was to secure the bottle of liquor that was held by his enemy—his own being exhausted!

He was determined that he would possess it, even at the cost of his life; for his thirst was now maddening.

So intent was Bill in the enjoyment of the liquor, that he knew nothing whatever of his danger.

One fierce bound, a clutch at the bottle, followed by a terrific blow, and Black Bill fell, as if a bullet had penetrated his brain!

With an unnatural and horrible yell of joy and triumph, the maniac planter dragged his victim between the lumber piles, and there seated himself astride his senseless body.

There, the picture of an exultant madman, he sat, with the bottle at his lips, and drinking its fiery contents with insane glee!

CHAPTER XII.

HIDE AND SEEK.

MAJOR LINDSAY'S senses being in such a sad condition, when he heard the wild commotion in the city consequent upon the fire, he believed that the murder had been discovered, and that the people were in search of him.

Being amid the high lumber piles, he did not see the blaze of the conflagration; and, in abject terror, he crawled beneath a pile of boards, and there remained.

Then his brandy gave out, and he became frantic with the uncontrollable thirst that tortured him. The din had subsided, and he resolved that he would return boldly to the hotel and procure the necessary stimulant.

At times the image of his loved child—his darling daughter Lulu—would appear before his mind's eye, and the tears would roll down his furrowed cheeks. Then, by a powerful effort of will, or by a drink of brandy, he would banish all thoughts of Lulu; as too sacred to be entertained by him, in the condition in which he was.

He dared not trust himself to think of his beautiful home as lost to him; of his wealth, upon which the future welfare of his daughter depended, as having been wrested from him, in a single night, by trickery—and all through his having swallowed a glass of brandy to counteract pain.

His brain felt like molten metal. There was a hissing and a snapping, as if flames were in his ears, as such thoughts shot through his mind; and when his brandy gave out, he was on the verge of *delirium tremens*.

At length he became too weak in his limbs to stand; and he crawled among the piles of lumber in a most deplorable condition. It was then that, to his insane joy, he discovered a man drinking from an upturned bottle.

It was too dark for him to recognize the author of all his terrible misfortunes. All he cared for now was liquor; and that he must have, even if he was forced to fell the man to the earth. And this he decided that he would do.

The result of the major's effort is known to the reader.

Black Bill was felled to the earth, the brandy secured, and its former owner dragged between the piles of lumber.

Not long did the old planter sit astride the body of his enemy; for the brandy soon revived him, brought him back to a more natural condition of mind, and cleared his vision.

Then it was, it being now within an hour of sunrise, that the half-crazed planter recognized who it was that he had deprived of the brandy.

It was the scoundrel who had insulted him and his daughter by an offer of marriage to the latter; and he a confirmed gambler and drunkard!

Intoxicated though the old man was, he still had sympathy for Bill, in regard to the latter

bad habit. A strange excuse for deeper crimes!

He it was—this man, Bill Black—who had inveigled him into a gambling-den, for the purpose of ruining him financially; and, not only had this been done, but the brandy that had been pressed upon him had caused him to slay his fellow-man in a most cowardly manner—he a chivalric gentleman of the old school!

Had he murdered the "count" while the latter slept, the old planter could not have felt more remorse, when he considered that he had stabbed the gambler, when the latter had thrown open his guard to strike him with his fist, and thus end the fight without bloodshed.

To the man beneath him, now wholly in his power, he owed all the hell of misery that he suffered; and the loss of home, wealth, and self-respect—to say nothing of the avalanche of remorse by which he had been overwhelmed.

Major Lindsay became furious, wildly furious, his heart swelling with hatred!

He resolved to kill Bill Black!

Drawing his knife, he crawled off from his intended victim, got upon his knees by his side, and raised the blade over the breast of the senseless miscreant.

The life of Black Bill hung by a hair; but it was ordained that, whether he repented of his misdeeds or not, he was to be given time for it.

Surely a God of justice had naught to do in causing the knife to be returned to its sheath!

The Evil One must have controlled the arm, that held the blade, thus preserving the wretch, who appeared doomed to meet his death in a murderous manner, from the fury of the gray-haired old man, who held him at his mercy!

Major Lindsay had caught sight of several packages of bank-notes; the ends of which protruded from the pocket of Black Bill.

Quickly the knife was put up, and the packages jerked nervously—ay, with insane eagerness—from the pocket. Other pockets were then searched; and, when the major struck a match, he saw that he held nearly a hundred thousand dollars in his hands. The sight of the money cleared, for the moment, his brain.

He well knew that it had come from the disposing of his cotton orders and checks, lost in the game with the "count," Bill Black being a partner, and the one who had "rung him in."

The major was well aware that young Black had no money of any amount, nor could he get any considerable sum from his father.

This money, then, was his by right.

It was no theft to take it. In doing so, he was merely recovering his own; that which had been taken from him by a professional gambler and cheat.

This, although not nearly as much as he had lost, would save his slaves and cotton, and the portion of his plantation that was covered by the checks he had given "Count La Croix."

While thus reflecting, the sound of maudlin song and boisterous laughter met his ears; and he heard, soon after, several young men, all evidently intoxicated, stumbling around the lumber-yard. He soon perceived that they were in search of the very man, whom he had knocked senseless, and deprived of his liquor; the act culminating in the recovery of a portion of his losses.

"Bill Black! Black Bill! O-o-h, yes! Bill, where are you, old boy?"

"Come out o' that, Bill, and take a drink."

"You missed the dance, Bill. High old times, you bet, and no funeral!"

"Come, pard Bill. You've slept the whisk' off by this time, I reckon."

Such cries rung on the air and filled the old planter with terror. He thrust the bundles of notes into his pockets, grasped the brandy bottle and ran as though the fiends were in close pursuit, fear giving him strength.

When beyond the sound of the young men's voices, Major Lindsay paused a moment, striving to gain some sense from the chaos of thoughts that now stampeded through his brain.

He had a largesum of money in his possession, and, without doubt, Bill Black, when he found that the money had been taken from him, would be frantic with rage, and would seek him high and low. He might even be desperate enough to shoot him on sight, or betray him as the murderer of Count La Croix.

This possibility caused the old planter to tremble as if stricken with palsy, and he ran on, and on, until he reached the docks, where lay the Bayou boat, the "Magnolia," which was to start for Houston during the following forenoon.

The stewardess of the boat was formerly his slave, and he now resolved that he would go on board, engage a state-room and keep in it, hidden, until the boat arrived in Houston.

The stewardess would send to the hotel for his baggage, and would also procure him a hat, besides brushing him up into a presentable appearance.

This being decided upon, the old major at once went on board, and, finding the stewardess, who was full of pity and sympathy for her old master, and wondering at his evident deplorable condition, did everything in her power to make

him comfortable. She gave him a state-room, advising him to retire and get some rest.

Thus the old planter found himself in a fair way to shake the dust of Galveston from his feet and leave the city, in which, in a single night, he had passed through enough to craze an ordinary human being for life.

The outcries of the young men who were in search of him were heard by Black Bill, for he came to his senses a few moments after the old planter had left his side.

But he answered them not.

As soon as he had fully recovered from his bewilderment he thought of his money. Clapping his hand to his pocket, he found it was gone.

He had caught a flitting glimpse of the man who had knocked him down, and he knew that it was Major Lindsay.

Bill's face was now positively frightful, having the most fiendish and murderous expression. He grated his teeth in his fury, and then, with clinched fists, rushed away in the opposite direction from that in which the young men were searching for him, for he argued that the old planter must have taken that course to avoid being seen by the gang of young men.

There was murder in the heart of Black Bill as he ran, and, had he overtaken Major Lindsay, he would doubtless have shot the old man, or knifed him, on the instant.

All that he had plotted for was lost if the planter was permitted to reach home with the money; but Bill swore, by all the fiends, that he should not reach home—that he would kill him and recover the money at the risk of the rope.

The devil favored Black Bill on this occasion, as on many another, for, in his rage, he rushed heedlessly on and discovered the major just as the latter staggered on board the *Magnolia*. He now perceived, with mad rage, that he was too late; that it would now be impossible for him to accomplish his purpose.

But he decided, nevertheless, that he would take passage on the *Magnolia* in disguise the next day and recover the money at all hazards.

It was some consolation at least to know that he had the old planter corraled—that he had, by accident, traced him and could put his hand upon him at any time.

Shaking his fist at the *Magnolia*, Black Bill strode to the Island City Hotel, for he was now wilder than ever for a drink.

He had no longer any fears that the occurrences of the night would be known.

The fire had done its work well.

The dwelling of Dolph Drake, the professional gambler was but a mass of smoldering ruins, and Major Lindsay was safe on board the *Magnolia*.

The old planter had neither spoken with nor met any one with whom he could babble of the matter in his madness.

Of this Bill was firmly convinced, and he walked boldly up to the bar of the hotel, which had just opened, and swallowed a "stiff" horn of brandy. He then went to his room to prepare his disguise, taking a bottle of brandy with him.

It took all the consummate scoundrel's strength of will to control himself; a raging volcano of fury and thirst for revenge upon Major Lindsay surged in his breast, and his brain was seething like molten metal.

Black Bill was ripe for murder!

CHAPTER XIII.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

No sooner had Devil Dick buried his victim into the Rio Trinity than he quickly reloaded the rifle of our hero, the leaving behind of which had given the villain power over him.

He now secured it to the horn of the saddle, Black Cloud kicking at him, plunging and snorting in frantic fury; but Dick avoided injury, loosened the lariat from the tree, and sprung upon the wild steed in spite of its frantic actions.

Off he then dashed, through the dark shades, toward the south plain.

The sun had sunk, and a blood-red light shot up from the western horizon, blending with the blue, afar up, nearly to the zenith.

But Devil Dick, gazing up and down, along the timber line, and over the plain, saw not a sign of a human being. He broke a long, tough branch from the undergrowth, and giving Black Cloud a cruel cut, the horse bounded over the plain like a shot toward Houston.

It was nearly fifty miles from Bayou Plantation to Houston, the San Jacinto being midway between; but before the gray streaks of dawn shot up eastward, Devil Dick entered the suburbs of the city, the black steed covered with foam!

Not a soul was astir, and the villain sprung from the horse that he had stolen, and ridden at such terrific speed, and opened a gate in a high board fence.

Black Cloud was then led within the yard and placed in an inclosure beyond all view from the street. Devil Dick removed the saddle and bridle and rubbing the horse down with soft hay, he left the animal; meeting, as he crossed

the yard, a low-browed, evil-faced man, who from appearances had just been awakened.

"Howdy, pard Jim Budson?" called out Devil Dick in a gruff voice. "I'm hyer ag'in, an' deuced nigh broke up. Sing out some p'ison, soon es yer kin! I've rid all night."

"Drill me through, an' blow me up, ef thet ain't Devil Dick!" returned Jim, rubbing his eyes.

"Cuss me, ef I didn't thnk ther offercers bed run in on my leetle ranch, buntin' fer swag ag'in! I keeps a glim burnin' allers now, an' my shooter handy all ther nights."

"Whar did yer 'rove from now, an' hev yer cabbidged any wealth?"

"Less gab an' more 'freshments, Jim! I'm spittin' cotton. My whisk' g'n out et San Jacinto, fer I've rid 'bout fifty mile since arter sun down. My teeth air all on a edge."

"Skip fer yer p'ison on ther stompede!"

Jim shuffled across the yard, and the pair passed through a low door in a slab shanty, in which was partitioned off a mere box of a room, not more than eight by six.

A few black bottles on a shelf, and a board across the tops of two barrels, constituted Jim Budson's Bar.

Devil Dick's head was shaking, and his teeth grating; his appearance and actions speaking of his extremely nervous and broken-up condition, and warning Budson against troubling his customer with questions until he had braced up with sufficient liquid lightning to quiet his deranged nervous system.

We have not space, however, to detail what passed in the den of Jim Budson.

It is enough to say that Devil Dick mailed a letter to Black Bill, at Galveston, informing his employer that there had been doings at the Rio Trinity which promised trouble in the future, connected with that worthy's plans, but that at great risk he had removed that trouble, and was now awaiting funds and orders at the old stand.

There was nothing in the epistle that would be understood by any except the two concerned.

Devil Dick got "braced up" to such an extent that he cared for nothing, and lingered at the establishment of Jim Budson, until the evening of the second day after his arrival.

When at last he left, with a bountiful supply of whisky, he intended to gallop down the bayou to the nearest point to Galveston, there dispose of the horse, and join Black Bill.

Thus it was that, by a strange and unaccountable influence, Devil Dick and Black Bill were brought together; for the former, at daylight, reached a point on the bayou which was destined to be the scene of a tragic occurrence before the day passed—one in which Dick was to take a hand, although he had not the remotest idea that such an event would happen.

At the point referred to, which was near the bank of the bayou, Devil Dick secreted Black Cloud in a dense thicket and repaired to another at some distance, where he threw himself upon the ground to sleep off his deep potations.

When Herbert Howard was hurled over the high bank of the Trinity river by the would-be assassin, his body descended, head-foremost, in such a limp condition that it went straight into the water as would a practical diver. Had he struck flat upon the surface of the river, he would have been injured by the concussion to such an extent that he would have been drowned.

As it was, the bullet of Devil Dick had but glanced upon his skull, tearing the scalp, and causing the blood to flow profusely. This had deceived Dick into the belief that his victim was dead.

The dastard's brain was now in such a condition that he was filled with strange imaginings.

The flapping of the wings of night birds just appearing from their caverns, seemed to him the flight of fiends through the dark bottom-timber, and the ripple of the waters sounded like the suppressed laughter of the same horrid visitants.

All the time the superstitious assassin kept suspecting that some one was near; that there had been those within hearing of his shot who were hastening to investigate the cause of it. In short, the sounds, although natural, appeared to him to be ominous of danger to himself.

Hence his quick movements, his short stop at the scene of the crime, and great speed in his flight to Houston.

But, to return to our hero.

When Herbert plunged into the cool waters, it served to bring him to partial consciousness; the water being forced down his throat, nearly strangling him, and thus assisting in bringing him to himself. For a moment, he believed that he was again in the river in search of the fair maiden, whom he had seen fall over the bank, on her pony. All else, that had occurred in the interim, was at first little more than a dim chaos.

When he arose to the surface, he was some distance down the stream from the point that

had come so near being fatal to both Lulu Lindsay and himself, so he struck out with the current, keeping along the bank, and striving to solve the enigma that so puzzled him.

Soon his mind was cleared. He recalled the shot that had been fired, while he was skinning the panther. But whence was it?

Had the sworn vengeance of Black Bill anything to do with the attempted assassination?

It would seem so, he thought; for he was not aware of having any personal enemies.

In ten minutes more, however, he stood on *terra firma*; and freed his clothing, as much as possible, from the water.

Then, he first looked around him in every direction, and afterward raised his clasped hands on high, vowing vengeance upon the miscreant, more cowardly than a coyote, who had laid wait for him in the thicket, shot him, and hurled him into the river, to make sure of his death.

Such a wretch was more dangerous than a rattlesnake, for the reptile would give warning of its attack.

Incensed as was our hero, and determined upon revenge, he had yet to learn that which would cause him most bitter grief, and increase his desire, tenfold, to avenge himself upon the sneaking assassin.

He found that his weapons had been taken from him; but unarmed as he was, Herbert hastened on, up the river, to the point where lay the panther half-skinned—the point which had proved so nearly fatal to Lulu and himself.

Cautiously our hero approached the spot, but no human being was within view. No sound met his ears, except the hoot of the owl, or the whistle of night birds, the buzz of insects, and the scratching of climbing coons in the tree-tops.

The young man drew still nearer, with stealthy manner; and a half-suppressed groan escaped him, when he found that his noble steed, Black Cloud, was gone.

Herbert really loved the superb black horse, that had been reared and trained by him at the old plantation; and had been his constant companion, for two years, on his hunting and fishing trips.

The absence of the horse was very good proof that the assassin had fled; and Herbert sprung forward beside the dead panther, attracted by a glitter of steel, which proved to be his knife.

Carefully our hero examined the surrounding sward and thickets, finding the tattered bat that had been cast aside by Devil Dick, which, if its condition was on the same scale with its owner, proved that the wretch must have been a most forlorn, filthy, and destitute ruffian.

Hastening on to the hollow tree, Herbert found that his rifle was also gone. Then, examining his pockets, he became more infuriated at finding his wallet missing.

He had been most effectually "cleaned out."

The assassin must be a fool, or drunk, to fly in that manner, with all the evidences of his crime about him, even riding the horse of his supposed victim.

He had other feelings, however.

He reflected that his guardian-angel must have hovered over the assassin, brushing her wings before his eyes as he took sight, and then, swooping along the river surface, banished the numbness of his own brain, so nearly paralyzed by the leaden ball.

From his inmost soul the young man returned thanks for his providential deliverance from death. There was yet life, and Lulu Lindsay!

Then, with dexterous slash, he finished skinning the panther, rolled up the hide, and, with bare and blood-stained head, and saturated clothing, he stalked with determined step, and stern face, from the timber—and thence, over the moonlit plain, to Bayou Plantation.

CHAPTER XIV.

APPREHENSIONS.

LULU LINDSAY awoke from her siesta, with a cold perspiration upon her brow. Her dreams had been of deadly dangers—of danger to herself, to her father and Herbert Howard.

Slipping from her hammock with the grace of a swan gliding into the water, Lulu hastened to arrange her toilet, and then returned to the veranda, which she began pacing up and down at the south end of the mansion. From there she could gain a view of the plain beyond the fields, from which direction Herbert would return.

When the sun sunk below the horizon line, and Aunt Huldj dispatched Pomp for instructions in regard to supper, Lulu returned word that they must await the arrival of Mr. Howard.

The non-appearance on the plain of the young man caused our heroine some anxiety. It would not, she knew, occupy much time to remove the skin of the panther; certainly not until sunset.

Yet Herbert came not.

But as she strained her eyes up the river, the young girl perceived a horseman flying like the wind toward the San Jacinto; but the color of the horse or the character of the rider could

not be decided. All were alike at that distance.

It could not, however, be a negro, as slaves were not permitted to go beyond the limits of plantations at such an hour.

It must be a white man.

Could it be Herbert galloping away?

Back and forth the maiden paced nervously, still darting frequent glances over the plain to the west.

Yet Herbert Howard was not to be seen anywhere in the broad moonlit vista.

Then, at last, Lulu recalled a statement of her father, that panthers always prowled in pairs, and a pang of apprehension and horror shot through her anxious young heart.

Perhaps the mate to the beast that Herbert had slain had been lying in wait amid the branches, or moaning over the carcass of the dead brute, and had sprung upon him when he arrived at the scene of her recent peril, and torn him in pieces!

No sooner did this occur to the maiden—it seeming not only possible, but very probable—than a groan of horror burst from her lips at the picture she had conjured up in her imagination. She came to a halt; her eyes fixed and staring upon the plain, and her face pale as death.

She could no longer bear the torturing suspense.

"Saddle Blanco and Negro, quick, Pomp! You must ride with me up the river. I fear that some harm has befallen Mr. Howard!"

Thus ordered Lulu, and little Pomp dashed away instantly to obey.

Quickly the young girl changed her attire for a costume befitting the saddle and the hour.

In ten minutes more she and Pomp were galloping toward the plain, past the fields, and then west, up the river, parallel with the dark towering timber; old Aunt Huldry exclaiming:

"May de good Lor' bless my young missus! I'm fear'd she's gwine plum lunny since dat painter done sketched her. Ef a critter hev tore Mars' Howard up, she'll cry her eyes out."

Not far did they ride when the figure of a man walking on the plain caught their view.

It was a strange sight to see one on foot in Texas so far from a dwelling, as every one rode on horseback even when going a short distance.

The pedestrian quickened his pace as he perceived the approaching pair. Then Lulu perceived that he was without a hat, and had a bundle on his arm.

Ere long she recognized Herbert, and with a cry of joy urged Blanco toward him.

The young man halted as the pony dashed up, and without a word, extended his hand to Lulu.

The maiden's hand trembled as he took it; in fact, her whole form was agitated, and she became deathly pale, as she cried out in a quivering voice:

"Oh, Herbert! What has happened? You look so strange—you are wounded!"

"Be calm, Lulu," he replied in an unconcerned manner; "it is nothing, really. I have met with an accident, but I am not seriously injured. I am alive, you see, and most happy to see you; but I don't think you ought to be riding on the plain at this hour, or indeed at any time of day, without an escort capable of defending you. I mean it, Lulu!"

"Danger and death lurk in the shades of the Rio Trinity bottom-timber, as my experiences this day prove. But, let us hasten to the house, and I will explain everything, when I have once more changed my attire."

"Pomp, gallop to the plantation and see if my clothing is dry. If it is, take it to my room."

"I will walk by Miss Lulu's side, if she is determined to linger."

The young lady had shown by a very decided shake of the head, that she would not gallop back to her home, as Herbert had desired her to do.

He had rattled off his speech in such a manner, that he banished much of her concern on his account, as he intended. Pomp hastened to return, and Herbert walked on, keeping pace with Blanco toward Bayou Plantation.

"I must tell you of a trouble that has just befallen me, Lulu," said the young man. "I have lost my noble horse, Black Cloud, and also my arms; and I came within a hair's breadth of losing my life!"

"Oh, Herb! You startle me! In the name of wonder, what has happened? From what you have said, I infer that you owe your losses, and an attempt at your life, to some enemy. I had begun to fear that the mate of the panther you shot had attacked you; and this caused me to come in search of you."

"For Heaven's sake, explain this mystery?"

"I believe it was providential, in more ways than one, that the panther threatened your life; for a worse than panther was lurking close at hand."

"An inhuman fiend, an assassin and thief, was not far from the scene of to-day's startling occurrences. Lulu, I was shot; the bullet, luckily, glancing upon my skull when I was removing the skin of the panther. And then, when senseless—dead, as the miscreant thought—I

was hurled into the river, at the same point where Blanco fell over with you."

The maiden was speechless with horror.

"Fortunately for me," continued Herbert, "I did not receive such a severe concussion of the brain, as to continue senseless after being hurled into the river. The water revived me, and I swam to the very wash-out where we succeeded in reaching the upper bank. On my return, I found that the cowardly murderer had fled, robbing me as I have stated."

"In addition to my horse and arms, he stole quite a sum of money, before casting me in the river."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed the girl. "What does it mean? Was there any motive except robbery? Did you see the dastard?"

"Not a glimpse of a human did I get. Lulu, I do not think that I have an enemy in the world. I am at a loss how to account for it."

"As to my horse and effects, the villain could not retain them, without jeopardizing his life."

"I have sworn to trace him up, recover my horse if possible, and avenge my attempted assassination. Between you and myself, Lulu, I have my suspicions that Black Bill is at the bottom of this affair; that he has a spy in this vicinity who witnessed the occurrences of the day, and, fearing that I would be in the way of his employer's sworn revenge, shot me."

"Herbert," said the young girl, "if your suspicions are correct—and I admit that your reason plausibly—if the tool of Black Bill will commit murder what will not the principal himself do?"

"I tremble to think of the peril you have passed. I cannot wonder now, that I felt so anxious on your account. Oh, if my father were only at home, safe, and that inhuman monster banished to the Feejees!"

"I would rather, Herbert, that the attempt upon your life should originate from Black Bill than from any other source, for it will give you the power to crush him, if you can trace it to his door."

"You reason well," replied our hero, "and I shall have no peace of mind until I do trace out the criminal, for I believe I was shot to remove me from the way of those who would abduct you from your home and father. The wording of Black Bill's oath, as you explained it, implied that he intended to steal you, and bear you from your home."

"Great God! I grow furiously frantic when I think of it! Henceforth he has me to contend against."

By this time our hero and heroine had reached the road that led to the mansion between the fields, and Lulu suddenly jerked her pony to a halt, laid her hand upon Herbert's shoulder, and exclaimed, in a voice of great excitement:

"How stupid I have been! It has just this moment flashed upon me—I have seen the man who attempted to assassinate you. When I was watching for your return, I saw a horseman dart from the timber, and speed over the plain toward Houston. I see it all now, plainly."

"The horse, that seemed to fly, was your Black Cloud and the rider was the thief and assassin!"

"Thank Heaven, that I know that much! It will save me some trouble in following the trail. I will start for Houston in the morning, if you will lend me a horse and equipments."

"I'll find Black Cloud, recover my arms, and shoot that dastard like a dog in his tracks. But here we are. One thing I wish to impress upon your mind, Lulu. Do not go into the timber, or away from the house during the absence of your father, and when he returns, you must only ride out in his company."

"Most assuredly! I will promise you that," said Lulu.

They reached the steps at the front entrance at this moment, and Herbert assisted the maiden to dismount. Pomp came forward, and took charge of Blanco, announcing to Herbert that his clothing was all ready for him in his apartment.

In half an hour more our hero was himself again, his wound having ceased to bleed, and been carefully dressed by Aunt Huldry.

Having attired himself in dry garments, he descended the stairs, and soon our hero and heroine seated themselves at the table, and began to discuss their long-delayed evening meal.

CHAPTER XV.

OUTLAWED.

THE little steamboat "Magnolia" had just entered the bayou from Galveston Bay, on its way to Houston. There were not many passengers, but among the number, pacing back and forth below decks, was Black Bill.

He was attired in a complete suit of black broadcloth, with a soft felt hat of the same color, which was pulled low over his forehead.

A long pointed and waxed mustache and imperial of sable hue, gave him a foreign appearance, which was considerably enhanced by his swarthy complexion.

His eyes were wild and bloodshot, and he made frequent calls at the bar for brandy, keeping below decks to avoid notice. But his des-

perate look caused those who chanced to be near him, to withdraw instinctively, as far as possible, from his vicinity.

There were many on board, with whom he was acquainted, but they did not detect his disguise.

It was a most lovely scene above decks; for the trees towered on either side of the bayou, and one could pluck the leaves and flowering vines from the boat.

Thousands of gorgeous creepers twined about the limbs, and magnolias threw out their subtle perfume on the balmy air; as well as the orange and lemon, from beyond the line of trees that bordered the bayou.

Birds, of brilliant colored plumage, sung sweet songs, and fluttered amid the foliage; and the beautiful Spanish moss—"old man's beard"—hung, in graceful festoons, from the lofty trees.

It was indeed, a most lovely tropical scene.

A wealth of Nature's luxuriance was everywhere.

It was a scene calculated to influence man to good-will toward his fellow-man, and gratitude to God.

Truly, it was one to make those who enjoyed it, happy, and at peace with all.

Yet never were there more murderous and fiendish passions in the human breast, than those that ruled the heart of Bill Black. He had, during the trip up the bay, ascertained the location of the state-room occupied by Major Lindsay; and he only awaited a favorable opportunity to enter the same, and recover the immense sum which the old planter had taken from him, at all hazards.

Not only this; but he had sworn to have revenge, although he had, as yet, made no particular plans, as to how this was to be accomplished.

He realized upon entering the bayou, that the time had come for him to act; that he must accomplish his object before the boat reached Houston, or all would be lost. Purchasing a cigar, Bill, at length, sauntered upon the hurricane deck, and made his way to a position abaft the wheel.

The passengers were astern, and a canvas-covered life-boat hid him from the few who could gaze along between the rail and state-room.

The state-room of Major Lindsay was next to the wheel, and this favored the miscreant; for the wheel made considerable splashing and churning.

To Bill's relief, the window of the major's room was now open. It was small, but he knew that he could squeeze in, head-foremost.

The villain stepped softly forward; and, as he passed the window, peeped in.

His dark face contorted with an exultant and murderous expression; for he saw the old planter, lying in the lower berth, in a death-like slumber.

Major Lindsay was as pallid as a corpse, and Black Bill swore he should be a corpse in reality, if he awakened. If not he would spare him a little.

Bill glanced quickly around.

No one was looking in his direction. All were enjoying the beautiful scene astern.

The miscreant thrust his head and shoulders into the window, and clutching the side of a berth, drew himself in; being forced to hang downward, in such a position that, had the old major awoke, he would have had the wretch at his mercy.

It was a tight squeeze; but Bill, in a moment, stood erect in the state-room—his face of ashen hue, and tiger-like in expression.

Black Bill was master of the situation.

Hastily he examined the coat and vest of the old planter, who still wore his pantaloons.

There was no money in either.

Bill became more furious than ever. He could think only of the loss of the money, and the blows that he had received.

Where were the packages of bank-notes?

He now reasoned that the money must be under the old man's pillow.

At any cost now, he must have it!

Drawing his bowie, Bill placed the blade between his teeth, and proceeded to slowly raise the pillow, and the head of the sleeper at the same time.

There lay the packages—nearly one hundred thousand dollars—and Bill clutched them with the quickness of thought, and thrust them into his coat pocket.

So eager was he that he allowed the pillow to drop back, and the head of the sleeper as well; this was somewhat violent, and the next moment Black Bill was in the grasp of the old planter, who with blazing eyes and foaming mouth, caught at the throat of the robber!

For a moment, Bill was paralyzed. The suddenness of the attack, and the great strength of the old major startled him. He expected, each moment, that the planter would yell, and alarm the boat; but not a word escaped his lips. His breath came and went, like the exaggerated hiss of a serpent. Thus each glared into the eyes of the other. Bill knew that his life hung by a hair.

He clutched the bowie from between his teeth, and by a desperate effort wrenched himself

partially free; throwing his knife arm upward and backward, at the same time clutching the old man by the hair, and thrusting him from him.

The next instant, the bowie blade fairly hissed through the air, and was buried, hilt deep, in the breast of Major Lindsay!

A deep groan of mortal agony burst from the old planter's lips; his death-stricken gaze into the swarthy face before him, being a look that one would not forget to his dying day.

The thin purplish lips of the murderer curled away from his white teeth, which were tight-set and beast-like; and his eyes glared furiously, as he jerked out the knife, and sprung aside, to avoid the arch of blood that spurted from the old man's breast.

Major Lindsay clutched at the side of the berth, reeled for a moment, and then fell—his eyes flaring in death—against the door!

This caused a loud noise.

Then followed the rush of a number of persons toward the state-room.

The door was tried, and found locked.

Loud voices now sounded through the cabin.

During this time, Black Bill stood, fascinated by the gaze of the dying man; but, by a powerful effort of will, he broke the spell, and darted through the window, landing upon his hands.

Shooting a glance astern, he saw that there were no passengers in that direction. All had rushed into the cabin, to ascertain the cause of the alarm.

Bill heard the hard blows of an ax.

They were breaking in the door, thinking that the major had fallen from his berth, and was dying.

Drawing his revolver, and cocking it, the assassin made a bound from the rail to the upper deck, and from thence to the top of the wheel-box; then, afar into the limbs of the trees he scrambled, toward the trunks and the bank, while bullets flew on all sides of him, proving that the murderer had been discovered, and his flight observed.

The bells tinkled, and the steamboat came to a stop, slowly, and floating backward; while half a dozen men sprung off, in pursuit of the murderer.

Black Bill was soon upon the bank—an assassin at bay!

His hand was in now, and he was as desperate as almost certain death could make a man.

Up went his revolver, the sharp report following quickly; and, with a shriek of agony, a man fell, with a sounding splash, into the bayou, sinking beneath the dark waters.

Another report rung among the magnolias, followed by another yell and splash. A second victim to the cause of justice sunk beneath the surface of the bayou.

Then, with outcries of terror, the other pursuers clambered back on the branches, and leaped down on the steamer's deck; one falling dead in his tracks, as his feet struck the planks, shot through the heart!

This man, however, was not killed by Black Bill, but by Devil Dick, who was, at this time, secreted in a thicket near at hand; he firing the rifle that he had stolen from Herbert Howard, on the Rio Trinity.

With a yell of derision and triumph, Bill, too much excited to reason in regard to the strange shot that had killed the man on the deck of the steamer, sprung away, and disappeared in the thickets.

He had chosen his time and place well, to favor his escape from the avengers of blood.

"An outlaw, a robber, and a murderer! Hal ha!"

Thus yelled and laughed the miscreant, as he hastened from the scene of his cowardly crime, continuing as he ran:

"I have kept my oath! I am avenged! The man who struck me lies low in death. Henceforth and forever, as long as life lasts, I am Black Bill, the Bandit!"

"The old man has felt my knife in his heart, and its pulsations have ceased forever. It is the daughter's turn next. Hurrah for Black Bill, who always keeps his oath. Revenge! Revenge! Black Bill still lives!"

At this moment, a yell in his rear, caused the villain to whirl half about, and present his pistol, desperation flashing in his eyes.

Running to join him, rifle in hand—to the great amazement and joy of the miscreant—he saw his tool and pard, Devil Dick.

Not until then, did the fact strike him forcibly, that there had been a rifle-shot immediately after his revolver fusillade; and that it had killed a man on the steamer's deck. He now knew that his faithful "pal," by some miraculous means, had been on hand to assist him in his defense and flight.

Panting with exertion, the pair of ruffians clasped hands, and then dashed off into a dense thicket, between two plantations; both feeling secure from immediate danger.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ATTACK AT THE BAYOU.

NOTWITHSTANDING Herbert endeavored to cheer and encourage Lulu Lindsay, there was a strong presentiment of coming disaster, that

pressed upon her mind—an indefinable something that told her that the dangers and horrors just passed were as nothing to what was to come. Herbert, too, was somewhat affected by like impressions; although he did not, in any way, betray the fact.

The eyes of the maiden were filled with tears, and she trembled greatly, as our hero grasped her delicate hand in parting, on the following morning.

It was not many days after, that both understood why it had been that they had felt so averse to separating; and had been ruled by such strange and unaccountable feelings.

An avalanche of horror and anguish hung over each, and would soon engulf them; and the shadow of it darkened their hearts as the parting words left their lips, and the last embrace was given.

Although Lulu could not understand why it was so, and strove to think otherwise, she felt that hope and happiness were gone—banished forever—as Herbert galloped from her sight, toward the San Jacinto, on his way to Houston.

Pomp had given the young man the best horse at Bayou Plantation; but our hero did not press the animal to its injury. He reached Houston after sunset the same day, and he passed directly by Jim Budson's delectable establishment, where the latter and Devil Dick were then carousing.

Had Herbert but known that Black Cloud was within thirty feet of him, the general course of our story would have been materially changed. But it was not so to be.

He went immediately to a hotel, and retired soon after, being greatly fatigued. He did not wish to confide in, or to consult with the authorities in regard to the man he had sworn to trail; as he believed he could act detective quite as well as any one who was less interested, if not better.

He awoke refreshed, and the day was spent in wandering about the town, and in making casual inquiries in regard to his blacksteed; but no clew could he get.

He started for his home, with the intention of reaching it in the night-time, stealing up to his room, and, after procuring his extra arms, depart without his father's knowledge; desirous, as he was, that his parent should think him still on a hunting trip, and not in search of a murderous ruffian, who might possibly get the "drop" on him.

The mother of Herbert was dead, and he was an only child; almost idolized by his surviving parent, whom he wished to save from anxiety on his account.

His plans, with this intent, were carried out.

The next morning found our hero again at some distance from his home; a brace of Colt's "sixes" buckled about his waist, and he on his way up the bayou—in the direction of Houston.

Little did Herbert dream that the cowardly wretch whom he sought had left Houston an hour after he did—that Black Cloud's hoofs had been, many a time, in the hoof-prints of the horse that he himself rode!

He reached the same point at which the steamer stopped, in her course up the bayou, upon the murder of Major Lindsay being discovered, at the time that the revolver-shots broke upon the air; but Herbert had not the least idea what had caused the firing—the thickets shutting off all view of the bayou, and the trees that bordered it as well.

The young man's state of mind, in regard to the dangers that threatened the Lindsays, through such a desperate character as Black Bill, prevented him from hearing the steamboat, in its passage up the bayou, but a little distance away. But at the very moment the first shot broke on the air, the whining of a horse, within a thicket not ten feet away, drew his attention.

There was a peculiarity in the sound that was familiar, and instantly Herbert sprung from his saddle, and keeping a hold upon the neck-ropes, darted into the bushes, guided by the sound.

An agreeable suspicion flashed through his mind.

It was confirmed when he penetrated the thicket, for there, to his great joy, stood his own steed, Black Cloud, manifesting his delight in the expression of his large and intelligent eyes.

Our hero was overjoyed, and doubly surprised, to discover his belt of revolvers hanging upon the saddle-born. It was even better than he had anticipated. But, meanwhile, he heard other shots.

The assassin and thief was, then, near at hand, and engaged in more crime.

The dastard was evidently drunk, or he would not have left the belt of arms behind him.

He would soon return, perhaps pursued, and he would depend upon Black Cloud as his means of escape. In this he should be frustrated.

He realized that he must work lively, if at all.

The moments to come were, he believed,

pregnant with much that he should know. He, at once, led Black Cloud from the thicket.

Secreting both the animals near, Herbert now returned, at a run, to the vicinity of the point where he had found his horse. Crouching there, he soon perceived two men, running toward him from the river. One held his own rifle in hand, the other, a revolver; one was ragged and filthy, the other was attired like a gentleman.

Both glanced over their shoulders, as if expecting pursuit, and dashed quickly into the undergrowth where Black Cloud had been.

"Hell and fury! Cuss the luck, the horse is gone!"

These words, the young man heard, uttered in a voice, hoarse with furious passion.

"You were a fool, Dick, to leave the beast so near the road! You are too drunk for business, anyway. But, come on! It won't do to linger here, or we'll be corraled; although, I reckon, we gave the boat people all they can chew. They won't bother us, but our shots may have been heard on the road."

"Come on, I say! Blast the horse! There's plenty of them, all around the country."

"What, ther deuce, war ther rumpus on ther boat?"

"Never you mind, Dick. We've got to lay low, for a little, and then levant lively. That's all!"

All this, Herbert Howard heard, as the two dastards rushed inland from the bayou.

Just then, a startling whistle sounded from the Magnolia; and the two fugitives bounded away more swiftly, and disappeared from view.

What it meant, our hero could not imagine.

He wished to hasten to the steamboat, and ascertain what had occurred; but if he did, he would lose track of the ruffians. Who could they be?

There was something in the face of the fashionably-attired villain, that seemed familiar. Herbert decided that he would follow hastily after them.

They had not gone in the direction of the horses, consequently the young man had no pressing reasons to reveal himself. He believed that he was on the eve of a discovery, that was connected with Lulu Lindsay and her father.

It was after much wearisome crawling, and advancing softly, and with great care, among the thickets, that our hero at length found that he was in the vicinity of the two miscreants; who, he felt assured, since he had thought upon the subject, had slain some one on the boat, the sound of the paddle-wheel of which he could now hear distinctly, as the Magnolia continued on her way up the bayou.

Herbert gained a position, from which, by parting the foliage, he could see the two men, who were as yet an enigma to him.

The one, who held the gun that had been stolen on the Trinity, and who had shot him, was, Herbert thought, the most desperate and degraded looking ruffian he had ever seen.

While he scanned the face of the other, to his intense surprise, the man removed his mustache and imperial, put them, with his soft sombrero into his pocket, and pulling a smaller hat from another pocket, put the same on his head.

Our hero now recognized this man as Black Bill, and had no longer any doubts as to the object of the ragged ruffian on the Trinity.

The man, who had shot him, was a tool of Black Bill. He had thought so, from the first.

The latter drew a roll of bank notes from an inner pocket, and passed a number to his "pal."

"There, Devil Dick!" he said; "that will pay for a first class outfit. Can we trust Jim to purchase it?"

"Jim's O. K., Bill! He's just the man for the business. I wish I was holed with him now!"

"Satan chew me, if I wouldn't like to know what 'come o' that black boss! Darned ef he warn't a reg'lar rustler on the run!"

The villains now braced themselves with a drink of liquor: Black Bill saying afterward:

"Dick, everything is plain sailing now. But, mind you don't get drunk!"

"I think too much of my neck, to blab, Bill. But, let's git out'n this cussed hole. I mean ter find that black boss yit."

"Oh, hang it! Take another drink, and let's git. If we linger, we'll be hunted from here to Houston, before nightfall. Let the horse rip!"

As the ruffians disappeared, it being impossible to follow, unless at a long distance, Herbert hastened to the thicket, where he had left the animals.

Mounting Black Cloud, and leading the other horse, he rode out from the undergrowth.

At that instant, a prolonged shriek of superstitious horror rung on the air, followed by the report of a revolver, several times discharged; and the bullets flew wildly over the head of our hero, as he threw himself forward in the saddle.

Then all became still as death.

Herbert drew his six-shooter, and let fly a dozen shots, here and there, into the thickets from whence, as far as he could determine, he had been fired upon.

An outcry of agony, wild and loud, followed.

Then, again, silence reigned in the vicinity of the place where murder, in a horrible and cowardly manner, had been perpetrated, wholesale, by Black Bill and Devil Dick!

CHAPTER XVII.

WEEPING AND WAILING.

HERBERT did not think it prudent to secure his extra horse, and leave the animal; or he would have dashed through the thickets, and endeavored to capture, or shoot the miscreants.

He was now satisfied that Black Bill was fully as cowardly and depraved as his tool, whom he had overheard Bill address as "Devil Dick," and a most appropriate cognomen he considered it.

If Herbert now left the extra horse, one of the dastards might escape on it. Sooner or later, the young man felt assured that they would steal horses, at one of the neighboring plantations, and fly.

That Black had committed some heinous crime on the steamboat, and had sprung from the boat into the branches, to escape arrest, our hero was satisfied; and not only this, but that the crime had been premeditated, and the place appointed to commit it, was evident, he thought, from the presence there of Devil Dick.

Black Bill had, of late, been in Galveston, and not until this occurred to Herbert, did he think of Major Lindsay as being, in any way, connected with the villain's appearance, and the shooting at the steamboat.

The probability that the major had been on the boat, that Black Bill had met him, and that they had then and there engaged in mortal combat—revenge being uppermost in Bill's mind—now flashed through the brain of Herbert Howard, and nearly took his breath away; the oft-repeated words of apprehension from Lulu, being recalled by our hero, and strengthening his grave suspicions.

Herbert had sat on his black steed, reloading his revolvers, but shooting keen glances all about him; and no sooner did the suspicions we have mentioned flash upon him, than he quickly spurred up the bayou, at headlong speed, the extra horse in the lead. Haste was now important.

He knew that it would be next to impossible to trace the two dastards, in the thickets; and also that they might, at any instant, shoot him dead, at close range, from some covert. They could only be captured by a large body of searchers, surrounding the thickets between the road and bayou, and closing in. But, satisfied that he could accomplish nothing alone, and might lose his life if he attempted to search the thickets, Herbert, tortured in his mind by his fears in regard to the shooting at the steamboat, and the appearance of Black Bill, galloped on toward Houston.

He arrived shortly after the "Magnolia" had made fast; and his heart sprung to his throat, as he perceived a surging crowd at the landing, and on the boat.

That something dreadful had happened, he was now confident; and that Black Bill was at the head of it.

Securing his horses to a post, Herbert rushed to the landing; the subdued, murmuring conversation of the crowd affecting him in a degree.

"What has happened on the 'Magnolia,' gentlemen?" asked Herbert, hurriedly, his face pale with apprehension of, he knew not what.

"Major Lindsay, of the Trinity, was murdered on the up-trip from the bayou!"

"Stabbed to the heart!"

"Dead as a door nail!"

Such replies came from all sides; and, at the mention of the name of Lulu's father, Herbert staggered, and pressed his palms to his forehead—all the horror, and anguish, and agony of soul, for what the poor girl would suffer, being immediately brought home to him.

This was but for a moment. Then Herbert braced himself and shouted:

"Gentlemen, for God's sake! Some of you find the sheriff, and have him go with a posse down the bayou, to the scene of the crime!"

"Major Lindsay was murdered by Bill Black, in disguise! I heard the shots, at the steamboat, and saw Black, and a man whom he called Devil Dick, rush from the bayou to the thickets."

"Devil Dick shot me, on the Rio Trinity three days ago, and stole my horse and arms. I was in search of him, and discovered the two villains together, soon after this tragedy must have happened. They both fired at me, and I at them. I wounded one of them, and recovered my horse and arms."

"I repeat, for God's sake, go to the sheriff at once, and explain! Let him hunt the dastards to earth. I am worn, and fatigued out; but I will join the hunt, as soon as I have seen the corpse, and learned the particulars."

A loud murmur of amazement greeted the fast rattled off words of our hero, followed by ejaculations of rage and astonishment; stern-faced men rushing at once for their horses, near at hand, one volunteering the information that the sheriff was then on board the "Magnolia."

Others swore that they wanted no sheriff, and significantly intimated the tying of a

noose about their necks, as they started at once for their horses.

Herbert rushed on board the steamer, elbowing his way through the crowd, who respectfully made way for him when they recognized him; for all, rich and poor, white and black, respected Herb Howard.

Soon he reached the vicinity of the stateroom, upon the floor of which lay the blood-stained form of Major Lindsay; a gaping gash in his breast, and a face that was fearfully ghastly in contrast with the gore, and his black costume.

Our hero gazed at the sightless eyes, now fixed upward, and at the terrible knife wound; and he was forced to catch at the side of the door to sustain himself, as his strong form trembled, while he thought of the beautiful and bereaved daughter, on the Rio Trinity.

He felt, however, that this would not do. Immediate action was necessary, or the murderer would escape. He quickly sought the sheriff, and then the two searched for and found the captain; the latter, at the request of Herbert, detailing the circumstances as far as they were known to him, and increasing the amazement of Herbert, by informing him that three of the gentlemen, who had sprung into the branches, in pursuit of the assassin, had been shot dead—the bodies of two of them falling into the bayou.

The young man then detailed what he had seen, informing the eager listeners that the assassin was none other than Black Bill, who had been upon the boat in disguise; also, that he had a confederate called Devil Dick, who had, beyond a doubt, shot one of the men with a rifle that had been stolen from himself on the Rio Trinity.

The sheriff waited not a moment.

Requesting Herbert to accompany him, he hastened from the boat, accepting the loan of the extra horse from our hero.

From what the reader already knows of Black Bill, it will not be a surprise to learn that although fully fifty men beat the bush with revolvers cocked, and ready to wound the miscreants to such an extent that they could capture and hang them, neither of them were caught sight of.

No man on earth ever suffered more torturing, for the time, than did Herbert Howard.

His mind was filled with thoughts of Lulu Lindsay and the probable effect upon her of the horrible death of her poor father.

He felt that he, and none other, must bear the awful tidings to his beloved, and the very thought of what he would suffer at merely witnessing her grief made him shudder.

The posse returned to Houston greatly disappointed at their want of success.

It seemed now as if the entire population were on the streets, commenting upon the terrible murders.

The mayor offered a large reward in the *Evening Echo*, and that paper contained a graphic and concise account of the "Terrible Tragedy on the Magnolia," occupying four full columns.

Utterly prostrated by fatigue and excitement was our hero, and he went directly to the hotel, from thence writing a hasty letter to his father, explaining his recent startling experiences, as he knew that the evening paper, in which he figured conspicuously, would reach his parent.

He felt that it was his duty to start at once for Bayou Plantation, but the idea was, to him, as dreadful as the walk of a condemned criminal to the scaffold. Early on the following morning, however, he set out on the sad journey.

Little did he imagine how bitterly he would repent having delayed to start for the Rio Trinity the previous evening.

Little did he think that a deluge of hopeless despair and suffering would be occasioned by that delay—an anguish, to which the agony of soul that the announcement of the murder of Major Lindsay would occasion, would be but as a passing cloud to a thunder-storm.

Thus on he galloped, a negro boy, whom he had borrowed from a friend, riding the horse that had been loaned him by Lulu. On and on he went, his great heart filling with grief more and more after crossing the San Jacinto.

On he went, to learn that the agony of soul he had suffered was as naught to what overwhelmed him like an avalanche, and bowed his proud form; causing his features to be so drawn with mental suffering, that his best friend would not have recognized him. This was to be followed by the most merciless and desperate thirst for revenge, which grew stronger and stronger, as he traversed his lone trail for hundreds of miles; suffering hardships and privations that would have banished health and resolution, and even all thirst for vengeance, in any man who was less perfect in mental organization and physical strength.

And on Herbert galloped, never in the least degree apprehensive of the torrent of bitter anguish, that would so overwhelm and dumbfound him.

Even when he drew near to Bayou Plantation, the rush of negroes, here and there, with wild gestures, visible grief, and howls of la-

mentation, merely caused our hero to think that some one had galloped ahead of him, and broken the terrible news. Certainly, he concluded, it must be known.

Too soon was he to learn the worst!

Determined to know it, he drove deep his spurs.

Black Cloud shot up to the veranda, where a perfect crowd of negroes, apparently half-insane with grief, the tears rolling down their ebony cheeks, were huddled around Aunt Huldry, who was filling the air with her bitter cries.

"De good Lor' help de pore angel!"

These were the first words which Herbert heard from the lips of the old cook.

"What, in Heaven's name, has happened?" he inquired, in a voice that was full of apprehension; and that startled himself, so unnatural did it sound.

"De debil white trash done stole our pore young missus, Mars' Howard! For de good Lor's sake, fetch her back ter pore ole Aunt Huldry, an' de chilluns."

Herbert Howard sunk forward, clasping the neck of his horse. He then threw his feet to the earth, still clinging to his steed for support; his face buried in Black Cloud's mane, his features working in terrible agony, and his strong form trembling violently.

It all flashed upon him now, like a stroke of lightning.

Lulu Lindsay had been abducted!

He was too late!

His darling was in the power of her father's murderer, Black Bill; and in that of his brother assassin, Devil Dick!

CHAPTER XVIII.

CARRIED OFF.

BLACK BILL did not reveal to Devil Dick the fact that he had murdered the planter.

This would have given his tool a "grip" on him, that might eventually prove to be dangerous.

Bill explained that he had gotten into a difficulty with Major Lindsay; that he had wounded him, and had been shot at by those who pursued him, when he sprung from the boat into the trees, to save his life.

He had shot his pursuers in self-defense; but, nevertheless, if caught there was no doubt that both he and Devil Dick would be lynched.

Dick seemed quite indifferent as to the crime.

He boasted of the assassination of the stranger who had rescued Lulu Lindsay, and who had, he believed, gained the young girl's love by so doing.

He proceeded to narrate his adventures on the Rio Trinity in full, and also to give an account of his flight to Houston, and his departure for Galveston to meet and confer with Black Bill.

The disappearance of Black Cloud was puzzling, and Bill berated Dick for a senseless idiot, to have left the belt of arms on the saddle-born.

The latter now reloaded his rifle, and Black Bill his revolvers; and then they conferred as to their plan of escape.

Soon there would be a crowd of infuriated men from Houston searching for them.

Of this, Bill was positive.

They were, then, in great danger.

The only opening to avoid discovery was to cross the bayou without delay.

The searchers would not think of tracing them on the north side. It was a difficult undertaking, the banks were so steep; but it must be done.

Delay was dangerous, and the two miscreants set out.

Black Bill was well aware that his leaving Galveston would be known, and also that he had left at the time the "Magnolia" started.

His disappearance at that time, and his well-known enmity to Major Lindsay, would fasten the crime upon him in a few days.

Thus reasoned Black Bill, as he and Devil Dick stole through the thickets toward the bayou.

He was an outlaw!

Henceforth he would be a hunted man, but he had kept a part of his oath. He had killed the man who had so grossly insulted him, and who had felled him senseless at two different times in Galveston.

It would be the height of madness to return to the Island City for the remainder of the money that the Jew broker owed him, but he knew his man, and would, at some future time, when the excitement in regard to his crimes had died away, go in disguise, and demand from old Jake the balance.

The Jew would not dare refuse it under any circumstances.

In this way meditated Black Bill; but further self-communion was interrupted by a piercing cry from Devil Dick.

Bill turned half about in a great rage.

Dick's hideous features showed the most abject terror and superstitious horror. His eyes were starting wildly from their sockets, and fixed etc to the right.

Guided by his gaze, Black Bill flashed a glance in that direction and discovered a horseman—a

magnificent specimen of a man, mounted upon a coal-black horse.

He recognized the man instantly.

It was the son of a wealthy planter whose estate was situated down the bayou. Bill had long known young Howard by sight.

He knew now who it was that had taken the stolen steed from Devil Dick, and the appearance of the latter hinted at a grave possibility.

He clutched Dick and hoarsely demanded:

"What in the fiend's name has knocked the vim out of you all at once? Speak quick! Has he seen us?"

"That's ther cuss I shot on ther Trinity, an' slung in ther river—so help me Bob!"

This came in a gasping whisper from Devil Dick.

"You were drunk—confound you!—and didn't shoot to kill. Then he's the man that saved the girl I've sworn to own and govern?"

As he finished, Black Bill fired a fusillade with his revolver, but Devil Dick stood aghast and seemed to have lost all use of himself.

Bill clutched his pard and jerked him into the thicket.

The next instant bullets hurtled around them, and Devil Dick gave a yell of agony.

It was more from fright than pain, however, for he was merely wounded in the fleshy part of his left arm, above the elbow.

With terrible oaths, Bill dragged his ragged and filthy pard toward the bayou, saying:

"Now, brace up or you're a goner! I'll leave you, so help me Satan, if you don't come back to business right off. It's swim, now, or hang. They're after us!"

With these words he threw Dick's rifle, muzzle first, over the bayou, the barrel sticking into the bank on the opposite side.

Then Bill let himself down to the water's edge by the branch of a tree, first securing his revolvers around his neck, breech up.

With care he slid into the bayou, in order not to submerge his head and weapons, and struck across, soon clambering up the opposite bank.

Devil Dick followed, his brutal face corpse-like. Then, recovering his rifle, he joined his pard.

Then the pair plunged into the thickets north, quartering toward Houston, and lay concealed until dark, when they both made their way to the hotel of Jim Budson. Bill soon secured that worthy in his service.

He learned from Jim that he was known already to be the murderer of Major Lindsay and two of the passengers, and that Devil Dick was denounced as having shot another with his rifle.

This proved that Herb Howard must have overheard their conversation; that he had been near at the time of the shooting, and had recognized them.

Half an hour after, an ambulance, drawn by four first-class mules, rattled from the yard of Jim Budson. With plenty of money now at his command, Jim had procured the outfit.

All that was necessary for camping, was packed neatly in the vehicle.

Black Bill held the ribbons, and Devil Dick sat by his side; the inevitable whisky-bottle in his hands. The latter had been shaved by Jim, his hair cut, and he fitted out in a serviceable suit of clothes: a false mustache and imperial so changing his appearance, that his most intimate associates would not have known him. Bill had disguised himself, also, as much as was possible.

The mules were lashed at a terrific speed, when beyond the suburbs of Houston; the team being headed toward the San Jacinto, northeast.

When this river was forded, the ambulance rattled on toward the Trinity river and Bayou Plantation.

The sun arose, as usual in the Lone Star State, bright and beautiful, on the morning of the day following that of the murder of Major Lindsay. Lulu, from some unaccountable cause, had passed a restless night; and was out on the veranda, at an early hour.

In addition to her former gloomy presentiments, the young girl had now begun to fear that her lover might come to harm.

Much of her anxiety in regard to her father had been dissipated, since the dastard, whom Herbert believed to be a tool of Black Bill, had so nearly ended the life of the man who had twice saved her own.

She felt sure, upon reflection, that Herbert had rightly judged on this point; as most certainly, if the only motive had been robbery, there would not have been any necessity for the miscreant to have hurled Herbert, when senseless, into the river.

The thief—if he had been but a thief—could have escaped with the money and arms, on Black Cloud, and have been beyond pursuit, before any steps could have been taken to pursue him. Thus meditating, Lulu had stepped down into the gardens.

The cool shades were very inviting, and the maiden never tired of admiring the grand natural domes and arches, so beautifully moss-draped, of the bottom-timber.

Aunt Huldy stood in her cabin door, and with

arms akimbo gazed lovingly after her young mistress.

"I b'lieve Miss Lulu am in lub," she muttered, in soliloquy, "an' hit's dat Mars' Howard, dead sho'!"

With these words, the old negress stepped back to her cabin, while Lulu walked on toward the river.

Suddenly, two men—one of whom she instantly recognized, in spite of his disguise, as Black Bill—sprung from a thicket, and clutched her arms!

A wild cry came from her pallid, quivering lips; but the next moment she was gagged, her wrists secured roughly behind her, and she lifted bodily from her feet, and hurried up the river. Into the under-growth, darted Black Bill, with his captive; Devil Dick, in the rear, with cocked revolver.

The shriek was heard by Aunt Huldy, who yelled vigorously, blew the plantation horn; and then, with all the house-servants and Pomp, rushed along the garden paths, and into the timber. The remembrance of the recent escape of their young mistress from the panther, was fresh in their minds; as was also, the wounding of "Mars' Howard," which Lulu had confided to Aunt Huldy, and the latter had, shortly before mentioned to the other slaves.

Panting with exertion, being quite fleshy, Aunt Huldy reached the point where Lulu had been seized; knowing this by the plain "sign" of a struggle among the fallen leaves, and a handkerchief which she had dropped.

The howls, and tears, and lamentations of the simple slaves, who adored their young mistress, may be imagined.

Poor Lulu became senseless from terror, as she was borne from her home; and half an hour after she was placed upon a couch of blankets in the back of the ambulance; which was on the verge of the timber, near the scene of the narrow escape, and of Herbert's attempted assassination. Then Devil Dick and Black Bill lashed the mules, at terrific speed, up the Rio Trinity; keeping near the line of timber for a long distance, and then striking out over the plain toward the San Jacinto.

Their aim was to reach the ford some twenty miles west of the crossing between Houston and Bayou Plantation.

Thus was Lulu Lindsay torn from her beautiful home, and all she loved, and hurried away—only God, and the fiends who had abducted her, knew whither—while her father lay, a corpse, in Houston; murdered, in the most dastardly manner, by the very miscreant who now held her in his power!

Black Bill was certainly in a fair way to carry out his oath of vengeance.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE TRAIL.

THE two vile abductors knew every foot of the country that was before them—a two hundred miles, ride to Hemstead, and thence, two hundred and fifty miles more, to Austin, the capital of the Lone Star State.

All through this long journey the fair girl was kept in the back part of the covered ambulance; the gag having been removed the first day upon her promise of silence—as were also the bonds upon her wrists, escape being impossible. She had, at first, relapsed from one fainting fit into another, lying as if dead for a long time.

This had caused her captors to be much concerned, and to treat her, upon recovery, with much more consideration than they otherwise would have done.

At times during the wearisome journey the two miscreants became nearly stupid from drink, and Lulu began to dream of making her escape; but Black Bill had too much at stake to lose all control of himself.

When the wretch was far gone in liquor he would leer upon his lovely captive, and then would slowly repeat the oath of vengeance which he had taken, more than a year previous, at Bayou Plantation; but he dared not reveal the fact that he had murdered her father, lest the maiden, who had grown to be but the shadow of her former self, would die from this crowning anguish.

Depraved, merciless and murderous as was the character of Black Bill, he could not bring himself to wrong Lulu Lindsay any further than he had done.

He could not meet her gaze, or even, except by fitting glance, look upon her pure young face, now wearing the impress of hopeless despair.

Her wealth of golden hair in wild masses, seen in the dimness of the ambulance, appeared like a halo of glory about her fair face; carrying the hardened young man back to his childhood's days—to the pictures of angels that he had seen, and that had impressed him.

Lulu was not without hope that the miscreants would be followed by Herbert Howard, who, she knew, would rescue her at all hazards. In fact, thoughts of this brave young man were a great consolation to her. He and her father, she felt, would move heaven and earth in her behalf.

Had this poor girl known that the wretch in

front of her had murdered her aged father, she would have died of horror before reaching Hemstead.

It was certainly most providential that she had not learned of her father's brutal murder before being seized and borne away.

The oft-repeated assertion of Black Bill that she should be his wife, and that they would lead a free and merry life on the Western plains, rung continually in poor Lulu's ears; and she would, without doubt, have given up in despair but for the hope that would, at times, originate in the belief that her father and Herbert would trace the ambulance.

Gradually, however, the proud spirit of poor Lulu grew less and less strong and hopeful.

The merciless villains, as they reached thinly settled sections, secured a lariat about her waist, impossible for her to unloose, and then fastened the slack end to a sapling on the border of a small "open" near their camp, thus giving her an opportunity to take some little exercise.

Black Bill left all such duties to Devil Dick, who was filled with fiendish satisfaction at having it in his power to degrade and domineer over a "high-fly 'ristercrat," as he termed the old planter's daughter.

Everything needed by a young lady in making her toilet, as well as clothing in abundance, had been provided by Jim Budson, and placed in the ambulance in a large trunk. Nothing had been forgotten, as the hopeful trio had conferred together in regard to the outfit.

The journey was conducted in the most systematic manner; and as they traveled at head-long speed when the nature of the ground admitted, and as the up-country stage did not leave Houston until two days after the murder, they kept ahead of the news—going to isolated ranches to one side of the trail to exchange their fagged mules for fresh animals.

They passed through Austin in the night, crossed the Colorado at the ford below the town and, passing on for a mile up the bottom-timber, encamped.

Devil Dick remained in charge, while Black Bill, upon a saddle-horse which he purchased the day previous, returned to Austin. There he procured three wagons, with mules and harness. These he loaded with arms, ammunition and provisions.

From Devil Dick he had secured the name and abode of a man of criminal character, and he repaired to this man's house, paying the fellow a large sum to engage a dozen men in his service—men who would not hesitate to slash either a throat or a mail-bag.

The following night the wagons were taken charge of by three of these, the others being well mounted, and extra horses secured to the feed-boxes behind the vehicles. These, a strong "fit out" started toward Fort Mason, on the Rio Llano, Black Bill having resolved to seek some secure retreat, easy to defend, on the then remote frontier, and become a bandit chief, with Lulu Lindsay as his wife, or mistress, he cared very little which.

And thus we leave the fair Lulu, surrounded, and in the power of merciless miscreants—all hope gone after leaving Austin, she falling into a dazed and semi-unconscious state. The poor girl had reached that point in her sufferings when nothing can frighten, astonish, or appall—a condition but little removed from a death-like trance.

The reader will have undoubtedly decided, from the previous knowledge of Herbert Howard gained in this tale, that he did not long remain inactive, or prostrated by the terrible shock that met him at Bayou Plantation. Not the remotest doubt had he as to who was the abductor of Lulu Lindsay.

He had suffered fearfully since he became aware that Major Lindsay had been assassinated, fearing that the terrible news would break the daughter's heart, or cause her to go insane, and now, she herself had been stolen, and carried—Heaven only knew where—to a fate far worse than death.

It was some consolation to know that she was not aware that her only parent had been slain; but the wretch who had torn her from hope and home, would, without doubt, boastfully reveal his most fiendish crime, and crush his fair captive by informing her that she was in the power of her father's murderer.

Worst of all was the thought that had he started from Houston the previous day, which he could have done, the vile abductor would have been baffled.

Herbert dared not think of this, lest he should break down entirely.

When he had a little recovered himself, he demanded from Aunt Huldy the particulars of the abduction, and the old cook trembled when she saw the change in his appearance, the vengeful flash of his eye.

All was soon explained.

Then ordering Pomp to attend to Black Cloud, Herbert walked into the library, and dispatching one of the servants for the overseer, he, while waiting for the arrival of that functionary, wrote a letter to his father, explaining every-

thing that had occurred since the murder, and his avowed intention of rescuing Lulu Lindsay, and avenging her wrongs and the murder of her father.

A moment's reasoning in regard to the extraordinary and most agonizing circumstances, caused our hero to write also to his friend, the sheriff at Houston, requesting the latter to forward the body of Major Lindsay to the plantation, and send some responsible party to superintend the interment. He spoke, too, of the latest crime of Black Bill, and his intention of at once taking the trail.

This done, the letters being sealed, and directed, the overseer walked into the library, hat in hand.

Herbert, shutting the door, told the man of the assassination of his employer.

He then inquired in regard to any near relatives of the deceased, and the overseer gave the address of a brother of the major's, who owned a plantation on the Sabine river, near the town of Burkeville.

Much relieved, Herbert immediately wrote to this gentleman; giving all the dread particulars of the late tragic occurrences, and requesting him to come without delay to Bayou Plantation, and take charge of his late brother's affairs. He then directed the overseer to keep the news of the murder from the slaves, until after his departure; as their grief at the loss of their young mistress, had been more than he cared to witness.

Partaking of as much food as he could relish, crushing his thoughts and feelings to the background, by a continued and powerful effort of the will, Herbert prepared himself for the trail; and, in two hours after he arrived at Bayou Plantation, he had started on Black Cloud, to skirt the border of the timber, up the river—from which he knew the abductors must emerge, with their captive.

Suffice it to say, that he found the "sign," plain enough, and followed like a sleuth-hound; but, when the ambulance struck into traveled roads, he was delayed; branching off on side roads, and following strange trails—for, there were few planters who did not own, and travel in, an ambulance, exactly like the vehicle which the miscreants had purchased. Black Bill well knew the advantage he held in this respect.

And we must also ask the reader to consider the privation and torture of mind that our hero must have experienced during the long trail, already referred to in our brief detail of the forced journey of poor Lulu; for, although he lost all trace at times, he did not despair, but eventually found himself far beyond Austin, traversing the prairies through which coursed the Rio Llano.

Solitary and alone, where the wild war-whoops of the Comanches oft tortured the ears, and chilled the blood of parties of whites, that numbered scores—he went; his handsome face drawn and ghastly, and a desperate, vengeful glitter in his large, hazel eyes, that swept the plain with a keen gaze—ever on the watch for the black-topped ambulance, beneath which he knew was the angel of his heart of hearts, and whom he had sworn to save, or leave his bones for the coyotes to gnaw, on the broad plains of the West!

Black Bill and Devil Dick would have grown ghastly and trembled with terror, could they have gazed back on the trail, and seen clearly this merciless avenger's face and mien.

CHAPTER XX.

CREEPING CAT.

BRIGHT and resplendent arose the Southern sun, shooting broadcast warm kisses upon the millions of beautiful flowers, that peeped from the grasses of a far-stretching Texan prairie.

Not the slightest zephyr of a breeze stirred grass-blade or slender flower-stem; a broad, open view extending east, west and south, walled in at the north by a serpentine line of towering timber, that marked the course of the Rio Llano—a noble stream, which, from near Fort Mason runs through a fair portion of the Lone Star State—and, at last joining the Colorado when it rushes headlong toward the south, as if eager to be free from its lone pilgrimage, and to mingle its waters with the latter, in the long journey to the Mexican Gulf.

Huge trees of many varieties, grow thickly, their branches interlocking, and the same draped with long festoons of Spanish moss. These shades are somber and dismal enough by night, even when the brightest moon rolls in the heavens.

Myriads of gay plumaged birds warble their homage to the rising sun, their notes filled with the utmost joy, forcing one to halt at the margin of the timber, and turn to gaze over the broad, grandly-beautiful vista to the South, that he may admire the same; while sweet music fills his ears, enhancing his enjoyment.

Nor is the plain wanting in other than flowers to admire and study; for, here and there, are small flocks of fat and glossy turkeys, the hens feeding, and the gobblers uttering their loud and peculiar challenge to each other.

Here and there, are also to be seen, herds of deer; the antlered bucks stalking with a noble

and graceful mien among their particular favorite does; and to judge from their belligerent attitudes, much in the condition of the famous Irishman at Donnybrook Fair, who would "rather fight than ate."

And, not a few are to be seen, on the broad plain, with locked antlers, engaged in the tug of war; and, truly, it would be difficult to find a more interesting sight than such a conflict.

But, we have digressed a little from our description of the first scene in the last act of our drama. We have merely raised the curtain, and the actors have not yet appeared upon the scene. But, be patient, gentle reader.

As the sun rolls higher in air, becoming more brazen, the dew disappears from the verdure, and the deer wander further from the timber; while, afar out on the plain can be seen herds of mustangs, all these animals and birds that we have mentioned, serving to make up a view of the wild frontier, as it was at the time of which we write, some five and twenty years ago.

Animals, birds, trees, grass, vines and flowers, all wild as Nature created them, untrampled, uncontrolled, and unmarred, by civilized man, and teeming with Nature's beauties.

Surely this was an earthly paradise, which one would wish to remain as it was, forever and ever!

But such a scene as we have but faintly described, could not long remain undisturbed; and this was fated to be broken in upon by human beings as wild as the panthers that crouched, snarling, with blood-reeking jaws, in their dark lairs in the bottom-timber, after their nocturnal wanderings; for afar over the plain, dashing toward the Rio Llano at headlong speed bound a horde of Comanche warriors, their lance-points glittering in the morning sun, and their black, snake-like eyes flashing hatred—their hideously-painted faces contorted with a thirst for blood.

On, like the rush of the north wind over the tall dry prairie-grass; their arrows rattling in their dry-hide quivers, their long quirts hissing through the air and around the hams of their snorting, wild-eyed steeds—on they come, the warriors of the Llanos, like so many mounted fiends.

Naked from the waist up, naught but buckskin leggings, moccasins, and breech-cloths up n their bronzed forms; their broad breasts and murderous-looking faces daubed with blue pigment, vermilion, and white gypsum.

Their long lances, decorated with scalps, are loosely secured to the cantles of their saddles, the heels of the same resting in a socket of buffalo-skin at the stirrup, causing the weapon to project at an angle to the rear of its owner—the point high over the croup of the horse, enabling the brave to use his bow without hindrance; the shield, also scalp-decorated, hanging on the outer side of the quiver.

On, over the flowery plain, speed this hellish horde, threescore in number; their horses panting and flecked with foam. Yet still the air is filled with hiss of quirt, and the crack of the cruel lash, as it winds with a merciless force around the hams of the mustangs.

Why this terrific speed?

No foe is in their rear.

But their eyes, filled with the demon passion of hate, are bent to their front, their supple forms in their eagerness bending further forward than is their custom, as if to assist their animals onward in the break-neck gallop. The wildly flying manes of the half-frenzied mustangs flaunt in the painted faces of the red riders.

All this speaks plainly.

It is a chase—a desperate chase—and God help whoever is overtaken by this horde of hellish red-men!

And he who rides but two rifle-shots in front of this wild cohort is well worthy of our sympathy, as but a glance of the eye is sufficient to decide. For, gentle reader, the Comanche horsemen are pursuing with mad and murderous hate, but a single human being.

This seemingly doomed man is of the same color as those who pursue him.

But his equipment, saddle, bridle and general fit-out prove that he is an affliator with the whites, and explains why he is pursued, with an evident hatred, by the Bedouins of the American Desert—the Comanches.

This lone red rider is also naked from the waist up, but his leggings of buckskin are richly ornamented with bead-work, and a red silk sash about his waist sustains a long scalping-knife and a silver-mounted Colt's revolver of army size.

His moccasins are also headed in a peculiar manner, while a Sharp's rifle hangs at his saddle-horn. Altogether he is armed like a Texan borderer.

The features of this Indian are unusually regular for one of his people, his form is strong and supple, and his eyes flash with the fire of a furious hatred as he glances back at the horde who pursue him; yet not a trace of fear, or even of concern is discernible on his stoical features—just the opposite—for daring and bravery unalloyed are plainly shown in glance

of eye, poise of form, and taunting gestures, that infuriate the Comanches almost beyond endurance.

Upon the broad breast of the chief—for the three flaunting eagle-feathers in his beaded fillet prove him to be of this rank—in black and white pigment, surrounded by a line of vermilion, is the representation of a wild-cat in the act of creeping upon its prey, while about his neck hangs by a silver chain a crescent-shaped silver plate, upon which is engraved the following:

"CREEPING CAT, THE CADDO,

A WHITE AND SQUARE RED.

PRESENTED BY BURLESON'S RANGERS."

Creeping Cat was mounted upon a superb half-breed horse, dark bay in color, and built for speed and endurance, both of which qualities had been extremely taxed, as the foam-flecked sides of the animal proved, to say nothing of the panting of the beast. But the bay dashed bravely onward, without being pressed to any cruel extent by the lash or quirt.

The Comanches, it was evident, gained slowly, and it appeared doubtful whether Creeping Cat could reach the timber of the Rio Llano, his only hope, before being riddled with the deadly shafts of his enemies, who seemed resolved to capture him before he reached cover, where there was a possibility of his escaping in the dense thickets by abandoning his horse—not otherwise.

On and still on they came, their blood-curdling war-whoops filling the air.

On and still on flies the Caddo chief, turning at times in his saddle and with a sign of derision uttering the war-cry of his tribe in taunting intonation.

On, until the friendly timber was but two thousand yards away; but the Comanche horde were not a hundred yards in the rear of the apparently doomed chief.

Forty yards more to gain, and then their deadly arrows would most assuredly be effective.

Already were the steel point shafts fitted to bow-string, and the mustangs were being urged onward with touches of the scalping-knives; all dashing, like an avalanche of death, down upon that single brave and dauntless Caddo, who appeared devoid of any feeling but that of intense hatred for his foes, and contempt of death!

Suddenly, Creeping Cat threw up his carbine, the report instinctively following, and echoed by a far-sounding death-yell; which brought forth terrific whoops of furious madness, as the Comanches again jabbed their knives into their mustangs, the animals, with snorts of frenzy and pain, plunging forward in a mad mob.

The next moment, a cloud of arrows hurtled through the air, and the horse of the Caddo fell to earth; but the chief landed on his feet unhurt, and firing the six shots of his revolver, in rapid succession, into the advancing horde, who thundered toward him with fierce yells of exultation, sure of capturing him for the torture, he turned, and bounded toward the timber like a race-horse. At such speed dashed he, that even his savage pursuers forgot to lash their mustangs, in their astonishment.

The next moment, the air resounded with yells of baffled rage, signal whoops, and howls of agony and fury, from those who had been hit, or whose relatives had been slain by the daring Caddo; for Creeping Cat had gained, and shot into the dark shades of the Rio Llano bottom-timber!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PURSUIT.

CREEPING CAT, the Caddo chief, darted through the bottom-timber at great speed; following deer-paths, which, when they deviated too much from a direct course, he would desert, and plunge madly through the thickets. Soon he reached the river; where, for an instant, he halted, and listened intently to the sounds of pursuit. He detected, at once, that his foes had spread up and down the stream, before dashing into the timber, in order to hem him in, and prevent his escape.

On came the yelling horde, crashing through the undergrowth, and near enough together, to examine the thickets, and make sure that the hated red renegade was not in secret hiding.

The plan was cunningly conceived.

The Caddo perceived it, and knew that he had but one chance.

The river must be passed, and that without swimming; as his arms and ammunition would thus be rendered useless. Slinging his rifle at his back, Creeping Cat rapidly inspected the arch of timber, beneath which rolled the waters of the Llano. Here he selected a favorable point for crossing; and springing up a tree, with the agility of a squirrel, he soon mounted high up over the river, and began crawling and writhing through the interlaced limbs, which formed an archway.

Barely had the Caddo gained the ground, and darted into the bushes, when the Comanches

dashed here and there through the undergrowth, to the bank of the river, furious at not having seen any trace of the foe they sought.

A peculiar signal whoop, from the Comanche chief, caused all to seek favorable points for plunging into the river, and fording it. This was heard, and understood, by the fugitive, who hastened onward toward the north plain; although it appeared sheer folly to do so.

But, on dashed Creeping Cat, at anything but a creep; loading his weapons as he ran, in a dexterous manner. Suddenly he burst, directly, into a natural opening of half an acre in extent, to behold a scene that caused even his stolid face to exhibit evidences of the utmost amazement.

Before him were a dozen brutal-visaged white men, whom the chief knew at once to be "bad whites."

Each had a rifle leveled, the deadly tubes covering the Caddo's breast; and beyond them were three wagons with white tilts, and an ambulance as black as ebony. From out between the rear flap, or back covering of the ambulance, was thrust the head of a lovely, golden-haired maiden; her face, the picture of terror, but seeming to appeal to him—savage though he was.

After catching the eye of this young girl, who was none other than Lulu Lindsay, the Caddo chief raised his hand upward, stretching out the palm to those who threatened him with death.

This, on the plains, was a token of peace and friendship, and was so recognized.

Then he exclaimed:

"Creeping Cat, friend of white man. Look!"—pointing to his broad plate of silver—"Comanche thick in woods. Hunt for Caddo chief. Find Texan camp. Then kill, scalp."

"Give Creeping Cat mustang, quick. Then save white friends. Mebbe so Caddo chief lose scalp, but white friends take wheel lodges up river. Drive mules fast. Save lily-face squaw, with sun-hair."

At this moment, the bottom rung with vengeful yells, as the war-party reached the north bank of the river, and dashed onward, in the direction of the camp of the outlaws.

"Give the chief a horse, quick, Devil Dick!" ordered Black Bill; "he may save our bacon, though I don't understand how he is going to do it. If we are not booked for Hades, I am greatly mistaken; but we must stand our ground, and fight like fiends. They come in on us, without giving us time to think."

"That is a friendly Caddo, and he's as brave as a lion—you can see that in his eye and bearing; besides the whole party are in chase of him, and I honestly believe he stood them all off, when we heard the firing just now!"

Before Black Bill had gotten half through speaking, however, the Caddo had sprung upon a horse, and dashed crashing down the river at terrific speed; his painted face filled with the most desperate determination.

When at the distance of a thousand yards from the outlaw camp and at a time when the whites distinctively heard the crashing of bushes that marked the approach of the Comanches—then it was that the wild, piercing war-cry of the Caddo rung in taunting intonation through the timber, causing the pursuing red-men to yell with exultant gratification and lash their mustangs toward the point whence came the whoops of Creeping Cat.

This proceeding prevented the discovery of the whites, who, with stern and determined faces, stood prepared for the very worst.

They were saved from massacre by the brave Caddo who had probably sacrificed every chance of his own life to save the Texan camp.

Well did Creeping Cat know that there was but little chance now for him. His one hope was to be able to pass the eastern line of the war-party, and, as he was forced to utter his taunting war-cry each moment to keep the Comanches in chase of him—this fact enabled those who were at the eastern wing to locate him and take measures to intercept him.

From the fact that at the point of greatest danger all was silent, neither whoop nor signal sounding, the Caddo decided that his foes were lying in wait for him, as signals from him, which he understood plainly as directing an ambush, proved.

Yet on he dashed, still giving vent to taunting derision by the frequent war-cry of his tribe, determined to save the whites if it was possible, even at the sacrifice of his own life.

With a jaw-strap in his left and a revolver at half-cock in his right hand, he urged his horse through thickets and over every obstruction in his way.

Could he make a dash through his foes in front, and then strike out from the timber to the north plain, drawing the Comanches after, he felt sure of not only saving the Texans, but of escaping himself; for he found that the horse furnished him at the camp was hardy and quick of motion, while the mustangs of the war-party were already badly fagged.

And not far had Creeping Cat to speed before his suspicions were verified; for, with wild

yells of exultation, half a dozen hideous Comanches lashed their animals from the thickets, showing that they were determined to take the Caddo alive for the torture. Indeed, to have killed their foe outright would have fallen far short of satisfying their fiendish thirst for revenge.

The next moment the lassoes hissed through the air; but just then the report of the chief's revolver awoke the echoes of the bottom-timber as, in quick succession, the Caddo fired every shot from the chambers, even when the coils entangled him.

The scene that followed was fearful in the extreme.

Creeping Cat was the center of a whirlpool of horror; one lasso, luckily, having been cast about the neck of his terrified horse, the end of the same being held in the death-clutch of a brave whom he had shot through the brain. The rearing mustangs of the Comanches plunged around the Caddo, some riderless.

Whoops, and death-yells filled the air, only two braves being left who were able to wield a weapon; but both these, with long scalping-knives in hand, urged their horses up to the side of the chief's struggling animal—the Caddo being now in a desperate plight, from the ropes entangling him, and but too evidently doomed.

Enraged as were these two wounded braves at the death of their comrades, and their own agony, they were the more eager to take their foe alive; for they plunged their knives into his arms and legs as opportunities offered—the frantic plunges of the horses preventing them from clutching Creeping Cat, and jerking him to the ground.

For a brief time only, was the brave and dauntless Caddo stupefied by the terrible position in which he found himself. Then he drew his sinewy form erect in his saddle, gathered all his muscular strength, and managed, in spite of the coils, to draw his bowie.

Then by dexterous and powerful movements, he slashed himself free!

With the ringing war-cry of his people bursting from his lips, and rage and hatred in his blazing eyes, Creeping Cat sprung erect in his saddle, and sprung directly upon the horse of one of his foes; at the same instant, burying his knife to the hilt in the breast of the appalled savage.

For the moment, the surviving brave was dazed, and incapable of action. That moment's delay was fatal to him. The Caddo sprung from the mustang to the earth, and at the same time, his victim fell dead into the bushes. With a panther-like bound, he now gained the side of his only remaining foe, clutching the Comanche by his long hair, and plunging his bowie into the brave's breast.

Then, although the crashing of bushes to the west, and the terrible whoops, proved that two-score, at least, of his foes were close upon him, he tore the scalps from the heads of the fallen braves, chanting his victorious war-song meanwhile.

This done, Creeping Cat cut the friendly lasso, that had kept his horse from stampeding with fright, sprung into the saddle, and sounding the peculiar war-cry of his tribe, sat his horse until the hideous visages of a score of foes burst into view above the undergrowth; as they urged their mustangs toward him, not twenty yards away.

Thus sat the undaunted Caddo chief, his eagle-feathers crushed and dangling, mingling with his long midnight hair, his form covered with gore; the half dozen reeking scalps held in hand, waving them tauntingly over his head.

Thus, long enough for his foes to recognize him, and his gory trophies; then, with a whoop of derision and victory, he shot from their sight amid the undergrowth, and down the river.

In one minute more, the bottom-timber of the Rio Llano, at the point of the Caddo's desperate fight, was filled with a perfect pandemonium; for, when the Comanche warriors, who, at sight of the bloodstained Caddo chief, had felt that his capture was assured, discovered their slain and scalped comrades they were insane with fury; filling the air with howls for the dead, and vengeful whoops, and lashing their mustangs in a mad mob around the scene of the unequal fray. For the time being, the savages were bereft of reason, in their fury at the death of so many of their braves at the hand of one warrior; and he, a detested renegade—an affiliate with the hated Texans!

A sounding signal yell from the chief, however, brought all to their senses, and they dashed in mad pursuit of the Caddo chief, tracing his flight by the crushed undergrowth to the north plain.

When the war-party broke from the timber, Creeping Cat was discovered flying east down the border of the timber; but he no longer sat erect in his saddle. His proud form was bowed forward, and he clasped the neck of his horse, his legs clinging about the animal's body.

Before them on the plain lay the Caddo's saddle, which he had cut loose in order that he might cling upon his horse without discomfort.

The saddle was covered with blood.

With loud yells of triumph, feeling sure of their prey, the mad horde now pressed on, lashing their foaming, panting mustangs in the long, stern chase, knowing well that they could not overtake the Caddo, but believing firmly that he would fall from his horse from weakness.

And on, down the border of the Rio Llano bottom timber, flew Creeping Cat, his arms clasped about the neck of his steed, and the blood from a dozen wounds flying in bright drops on all sides upon the prairie grass and flowers—blood shed to save those who were strangers to him, merely because they wore white faces, and belonged to a race who had been his friends.

So ride on, and may Heaven save you, Creeping Cat—the noblest Roman of them all!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RIDE FOR LIFE.

THE horse upon which clung the wounded and bleeding Caddo chief, had been well-chosen by the outlaws for the important mission for which the animal was intended; although the Texans were so startled and alarmed at the sight of the awful danger in which they were placed, that they did not fully understand what the object of the friendly Indian was.

At first they had supposed him to be one of the war-party of Comanches, but his sign of peace and friendship, together with the inscription on his breast-plate, coupled with his speaking in English, convinced them that he was a friend; that his avowed intention of saving them, which his next movement attested the truth of, was all that they could now rely on.

There had been, as the reader knows, no time for idle words. All were completely dumfounded, as the loud whoops fell upon their ears, their guilty souls shrinking within them.

But, to return.

The horse was a hardy half-breed, and capable of great speed. This was proved when the affrighted animal broke from the bottom-timber upon the north plain. For, after the saddle had been cut free, and the sadly wounded Caddo chief, with much difficulty, gained his position on the beast as described, clinging to the horse's neck, then the fleet half-breed skimmed the prairie like a swallow, leaving the pursuers far in the rear.

Although far more nearly dead than alive, the chief realized that at the speed the animal was making his foes would be distanced in a very short time, and he feared only that the Comanches would give up the chase, and thus jeopardize the whites in the wagon-camp. For the war-party being so near, might camp, and in that way discover the deserted camp of the Texans, and follow their trail.

This would render all his desperate doings, in their favor, perfectly futile.

As he began to perceive this probability, Creeping Cat relaxed his gashed arms slightly, and drew upon the bridle-reins, thus checking the speed of his horse and enabling his foes to close up considerably before he again allowed the animal to proceed at headlong gait.

Thus the brave, self-sacrificing Caddo chief maneuvered until he had drawn the war-party fully ten miles from the camp of the Texans.

Then he took advantage of a southerly bend and urged his horse to the animal's utmost speed, still retaining command over his senses, braced by the inherent fortitude of his people. But he was weak from the loss of large quantities of blood, and suffering great agony at each bound of his horse.

When the Comanche horde turned the bend Creeping Cat was afar to the southeast of them, and beyond all danger of being overtaken, but he was still flying like a dry leaf before a "norther," alongside the border of the timber.

Not until then did the Comanche, with fierce yells of baffled rage, give up the long chase. The renegade red had not only escaped capture, but had slain ten of their braves, wounded two, and taken away, as trophies of his remarkable prowess, six scalps.

And, while the paint-daubed horde sat their nearly broken-down mustangs, giving vent to their rage and disappointment by terrific whoops, alternated by hideous howls for the dead, Creeping Cat, by a herculean effort, succeeded in half-rising from the neck of his horse, still clutching the mane, and turned slowly and stiffly, to gaze back upon his foes.

His black eyes glittered with the old fire, the war-spirit of his people causing his form to swell with pride, as he discovered the halt of the war-party. And, although too far from his late pursuers for them to observe the act, he retained his clutch upon his horse's mane with one hand, and jerking the gory scalps from his belt with the other, he swung the trophies triumphantly over his head; at the same time gathering all his strength to fill his lungs, and shoot out the war-cry of his tribe.

Then he again fell forward, having just strength enough left to turn his horse into the timber, at a deer-path, which the animal followed, until the river was reached.

Plunging into the stream, the steed buried his nose, eyes-deep, in the cool waters, and drank with avidity; the chief releasing his

clutch with one hand, to cast the refreshing wine of Nature up into his mouth, now parched with fever from his wounds.

Somewhat refreshed, Creeping Cat guided his beast through the stream, and thence on, through the timber, to the south plain. He then turned west again, and put the noble half-breed to its greatest speed, heading toward the point of danger—to the very place where his own faithful steed had been shot under him!

Daring to recklessness was this movement.

Into the jaws of death he had ridden before, and had nearly met death, escaping by but the breadth of a hair; and yet, wounded in a dozen places though he was, and weak as an infant, he repudiated all bodily sufferings and care for life.

By strength of will the Caddo chief forced his brain to rule his weak frame, and combat the agony that he endured. He sped along, on the back course, knowing well that he would be forced to pass within three thousand yards of the war-party, and with but the river bottom-timber between him and them.

By a mere chance he might pass without observation.

Strange would it be, if sentinels had not been posted, to overlook the south plain from the timber; and, if so, his discovery and another race for life, under much less favorable circumstances, might occur.

For all this, Creeping Cat sped on, up the Rio Llano, along the line of timber, and parallel with the same, but beyond bow-shot distance from the shades.

Why was this desperate ride, in a state that rendered him defenseless, in case of his again meeting with foes?

He had saved the Texans from immediate discovery, but he felt sure that the side scouts of the war-party would happen upon the broad trail of the wagon-train, even when not looking for it, and that the Comanches would follow it.

If so, all the whites were doomed!

Infuriated as were the Comanches, at failing to capture him, and at the loss of their braves and scalps at his hand, they would follow any trail like bloodhounds, and would exult like fiends, in the torture of their captives.

So large a force would speedily overwhelm the little party, that he had so strangely fallen in with.

The Caddo chief resolved that this must not be.

He did not do things, half-way, and he proposed to do all in his power to prevent the capture of the little wagon-train of Texans.

He felt assured, indeed he was confident, that the whites had obeyed his instructions, and hastened up the river; but this move would avail them little, should the war-party strike their trail.

For the day, perhaps, they were safe; but it was very doubtful if they escaped discovery for a longer time. His work was not yet done.

Creeping Cat had a mission to perform, in his terribly wounded state; a mission, which he resolved that he would carry out, in spite of his sad condition. So he still maintained his grasp on the mane of his horse; still instinctively retaining the precious trophies—the scalps of his enemies, slain in the unequal contest—fast clutched; the black hair, torn from the heads of the Comanche warriors, mingling with the half-breed's mane, as they flew wild in the breeze.

Thus on, over prairie-grass and flowers, rode the Caddo chief; his eagle-feathers crushed, his war-paint mixed with blood, his form from head to heel bespattered with gore, his flesh gashed by the scalping-knives of the Comanches.

On he dashed, until abreast of the point, beyond the river, where the war-party had halted, and given up the chase. Then the black and glittering eyes of the chief scanned the shades, expecting each instant to hear the war-whoop of his merciless foes, and to see some of them dash out from the undergrowth, in pursuit of him the second time.

But, naught except the flutter of birds amid the branches did he see; heard nothing but the continuous sound made by the fast-flying hoofs of his horse, through grass and flowers.

No emotions had been depicted upon the stoical face of Creeping Cat; but there had been a great strain upon his mind, at this time proved by his falling prone upon the neck of his horse, and clasping the same, soon after the point of danger had been passed.

And away toward the west, sped the hardy half-breed, frenzied from the scenes through which it had passed, and the strange sounds that had tortured its ears; together with the scent of human blood, and the strange rider upon its back.

Straining every nerve, at the topmost speed, with pant and frequent snort, on, with nose pointed, ears laid back, and neck in a straight line with its spine, sped the gallant beast; presenting a picture, with its wounded and prostrate rider, most strange, remarkable, and terrible.

Creeping Cat had, at first, intended to ride directly for his dead horse, and there recover his saddle, which he prized highly, as well as his carbine, which he had secreted in a hollow tree in the bottom-timber, when pursued so

hotly by his foes; the arm seriously impeding his flight.

But, upon second thought, he feared that the Comanches might return on the trail, for the same purpose; as they had probably been too anxious to capture him, to stop for any possible plunder, and, finding it gone, they would know he had gone up the Rio Llano.

This would be hazardous to the whites, for a small party might be sent to follow his trail; so eager were his foes to capture, and torture him. Hence, he guided the half-breed a rifle-shot beyond the dead horse, when he reached the vicinity of the scene of his recent great peril and miraculous escape; making a detour, out on the plain, and then on to the westward.

And thus, all through the day, rode the Caddo chief; his horse, at length, making but slow pace, and Creeping Cat, himself, with lips parched, and wounds tortured by the hot sun.

And when darkness enveloped the earth, he was far from the scene of his terrible race for life; speeding toward the timber that marked the course of a creek, which, a few miles north, emptied its waters into the Rio Llano.

Another chapter will explain why Creeping Cat made the long ride, in the condition in which he was; will, in fact, explain his mission.

CHAPTER XXIII.

REACHING THE RENDEZVOUS.

THE sun was just sinking below the western plain, on the night of the day in which Creeping Cat had passed through such a remarkable series of deadly perils, in his double race for life; when two horsemen approached the creek that has been mentioned in a preceding chapter, as a tributary to the Rio Llano, and which, later on, the wounded Caddo chief had pointed for at the end of his terrible ride.

Both men were small in stature, and nearly of the same age—probably past fifty years—although, having spent their lives, since youth, on the far frontier, enduring privations beyond the comprehension of those who live in civilized parts, they appeared much older than they really were.

They both were attired in tattered and greasy buckskin breeches, which were thrust into their boot-legs, and they wore blue woolen-shirts, and black felt sombreros, which had the appearance of having been used to wipe out frying pans when needed for that purpose; and retained upon the head, as night-caps, when encamped.

Each was armed with the inevitable brace of Colt's army revolvers, and a bowie-knife of huge size; also a Sharp's carbine, which hung at their saddle-horns.

Blankets in a compact roll, were secured at the cantle of their saddles, together with a pair of *malettos*, or saddle-bags, well filled; with tin cups, canteens, and extra lassoes, besides the neck ropes of their animals.

He, who rode in advance—for they came on, one after the other, Indian fashion—was wrinkled in feature somewhat more than his comrade, and his long dark brown hair was sprinkled with gray; but his hazel eyes were keen as those of a hawk, and he was continually sending lightning glances to the left, right, and front, as if at all times suspecting danger of a deadly character.

He rode a clean limbed, keen-eyed half-breed horse, a cross between a mustang stud and a Spanish mare; the animal being full of fire and vim, and showing strong points for speed and endurance.

This personage was one of the most noted of the old-time Texan scouts; being none other than "Old Rocky," universally known by this cognomen, from his having been with Kit Carson in the Rocky Mountains, previous to his appearance in Texas, and it was his frequent reference to this fact that had won for him the sobriquet we have mentioned, throughout the Lone Star State.

His real name was William Young, though but few were aware of the fact.

His companion was a most peculiar-looking individual, and was equally as noted as a scout, on the trails of the great southwest.

His hair might have been at one time dark brown, but the sun had burned the life out of it, and it hung in long tangled masses, more the color of tow than aught else with which one could compare it.

His face was comical in expression, wrinkled, and nearly devoid of beard; but slight, irregular patches were upon his chin and cheeks, and he had a very faint mustache of about the same hue as his hair.

But the most noticeable feature about him was the absence of one. He had but one eye; the socket of the lost optic being sunken quite deep, and giving him a doubly-comical expression.

However, the eye which had been left to him seemed fully capable of doing the duty of two, for it was sharp and piercing as the eye of an eagle, and was continually rolling in its socket, sweeping the plain on all sides, and seeming to bore into the shades of the timber ahead.

The old borderer was mounted upon a lank, ungainly horse, thin in flesh; and, strange to say, this animal, like its master, had lost an eye.

This peculiar personage was known throughout the frontier, from the lower Rio Grande to the upper Canadian, as Single-Eye, and his horse as Skip-Lively. The pair had for years been inseparable companions through many deadly dangers; the scout often being on lone trails, and conversing on these trips with his horse as though his equine pard were a human being.

The animals ridden by these two old scouts showed signs of having been long ridden without halt, as they were evidently in great want of rest and feed; but their ears were now pricked forward, for they scented water at the creek ahead, and they well knew that rest and good grazing were near at hand. Indeed, a Texas horse always expects to make halt, after a long run, at the first stream; and all streams in the Southwest can be located from afar by being bordered on either side by large trees, called bottom-timber.

The one-eyed horse could not repress a low neigh of pleasure at the prospect ahead, which seemed to affect the rider, causing some indignation on his part, for he addressed the beast in no mild tone of reproof:

"Dang my ole 'Merican heart, Skip! Ef yer doesn't quit thet sort o' condemned nonsense, I'll gouge yer t'other peeper out, sure es shoot-in'!"

"I've reasoned with yer, cussed et yer, pleaded with yer, and threatened yer with larnal dangnation arter yer hes g'n yer last kick. An' I hes tied yer head up ter a mesquite-limb, cuttin' off yer feed, ter jist whisperin' out loud on ther trail—An' thar yer go ag'in!"

"Dang'd ef yer ain't gittin' inter yer second colthood, fergittin' all yer edication, an' goin' back on yer ole two-legged, one-eyed pard!"

"Now ef yer hed skuted clean 'cross ther Staked Plains, over san' an' gypsum an' alkerli, all day an' night, without wettin' yer snoot er gittin' a peep et a blade o' grass, I mought kinder overlook jist a leetle squeal er nicker when yer did git a gaze et a good feed an' a big water-hole; but las' night yer war wallerin' in extry bufler-grass, an' up ter yer knee-pans in cl'ar drink, an' hyer yer air makin' a fool o' yerself—a reg'lar double-bar'l'd idjot!"

"Dang my skin, Skip, ef I ain't 'shamed on yer! Ef yer does thet ag'in I'll blow yer eye-winkers off with my shooter. I means yer bestest peeper et thet, an' I ain't jokin' 'bout hit."

"Dang my puserlanimous pictur' ef I ain't a good mind ter git off on yer an' hoof bit myself; I'm so ornighy sot back by yer or'nary ignorance!"

"What's ther difficult' atween you an' Skip, ole pard?" asked Old Rocky, glancing back and ejecting a squirt of tobacco-juice afar to his left.

"I'm chuck-full o' indig' et him, Ole Rock!"

"Thet won't do. Skip an' you orten't ter hev ther leastest rough feelin's atween each other. What's he bin an' gone an' did? Stumble wi' yer?"

"Nary a stumble. But, arter all I hes larned him 'bout keepin' hisself straight on a trail, he hes ter go an' nicker, jist 'cause he sees ther crick on ahead. Now, a nicker like that, in some p'int, mought fotch a sneakin' red hellyun smellin' 'roun', an' gi'n a openin' fer both on us ter flop over an' make a clean jump inter kingdom come!"

"Cuss my carkiss, ole pard! Ye're a darn sight wuss than Skip. Yer chin air a-waggin' 'bout all ther time on a trail."

"Doesn't yer s'pose Skip knows thet thar ain't no reds atween hyer an' timber? Ain't it cl'ar groun'? Ef he war in cover, an' c'u'd smell reds, he w'u'dn't wink onc't in ten min-ut's, an' then hit 'u'd be a sorter baby wink."

"B'ile me down inter soup, an' feed me ter Pinte papposes, ef yer ain't kerrect, Ole Rock!"

"Skip never went back on me in a tight place, an' hev kicked ther cussedness outen many a red hellyun; 'sides smellin' 'em out, an' cockin' his years, an' suttin' his peeper on a wind-mill whirl, ter let me know biz war ahead."

"Skip, I begs pardin. I'll take a day, sometime afore soon, skute out onter ther middle o' a big perrarer, an' low yer ter squeal an' nicker all day, jist ter relieve yerself!"

"Mebbe so if I doesn't, yer mought bu'st. Wonder ef ther Caddo hev struck a trail yit, ole pard? Don't ye reckon he'll be hyer-a-way ter-night?"

"Creepin' Cat allers kep' his word straight, an' I reckon he'll be hyer, ef he hain't been gobbled up by ther smoky sons o' Satan. I hope he's struck 'sign' thet's fresh, an' talks plain."

"Hyar we air," continued Old Rocky, "an' I'm ornighy full o' glad ter git inter kiver ag'in; whar we kin chaw grub, without hev'in' ter pour down brackish water or sulphur-spring drink."

The two scouts now entered the dark shades of the bottom-timber, and proceeded over the stream to a small natural "open." There they sprung from their saddles, removed their equipments, and proceeded to make ready

their evening meal. This was done by igniting a small fire and preparing coffee, broiling bacon and buffalo-hump steak on sticks before the fire.

Single-Eye, in the mean time, inspected the timber in all directions, to ascertain if there was any sign of Indians.

The horses were staked in another "open," near at hand, and the two old scouts ate their supper with a gusto and appetite, born of the long ride over the plain; each devouring as much as would have satisfied four men, in the ordinary walks of civilized life.

When the meal was finished, the horses were changed to the opposite side of the "open," and the prairie roamers seated themselves upon their blankets to enjoy their pipes.

Not long sat they thus, when both sprung to their feet and listened intently.

"Thar's a hoss a-comin', full chisel, with a human straddlin' ther critter, dead sure!"

Thus asserted Old Rocky, in some little alarm, as he clutched his carbine.

"Drap yer shooter, pard Rock!" advised Single Eye. "I reckon hit's ther Caddo."

"He wouldn't come thet-a-way, without some-thin' bilious war up," said the old scout.

"What in thunderation does hit mean? Hit must be Creepin' Cat, fer he's p'intin' plum hyer, whar we tole him we'd camp, an' meet him."

"Jumpin' Jerusalem! Dang my ole 'Merican heart, ef ther Caddo ain't 'bout hashed inter cat-fish bait!" exclaimed Single Eye.

"He's hyer, es he said, but hit's in ther shape o' a secon-class corpus!"

"Dang, an' double dang my puserlanimous perrarer, peregrinatin' pictur!" yelled Old Rocky, in the deepest concern, and utmost amazement, as the horseman approached.

"What in thunderation an' dangnation does hit mean? He looks es though he hed bin dragged by forty hosses through a chap'ral o' Spanish daggers, dog'd ef he doesn't!"

That which brought forth these words of amazement from the scouts, was the dashing of the half-breed horse into the "open," with the Caddo chief clinging to its neck. But, no sooner did Creeping Cat discover his white pards, than his grasp about the neck of the animal relaxed, and he slipped to the earth; the horse having come to a halt, trembling in every limb, and covered with foam.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FIGHTING FEARFUL ODDS.

WHEN the score and more of infuriated Comanches halted at the outer swell of the bend in the Rio Llano and gazed down along the border of the timber at the fast-speeding Caddo chief, they were frantic with baffled rage.

Never had they been more sure of the capture of a foe. Indeed, since the mustang of Creeping Cat had fallen dead, they had not had the slightest doubt in regard to securing the detested Caddo, who had for so long a time been affiliating with the *diablo Texanos*.

Great had been the amazement of the warriors at hearing the taunting whoops of the Caddo when they supposed him to be in hiding in the thicket. The daring and reckless bravery that he manifested, and his remarkable and most astounding skill and prowess in slaying the braves who intercepted him, and scalping the same when his life depended upon a fitting moment's time—all this, despite their detestation and hatred, created a feeling of admiration in their bronzed breasts; and, as Creeping Cat shot from their view, from many a savage lip came the ejaculation:

"Big Medicine! Creeping Cat heap Big Medicine!"

Many among them vested the Caddo with supernatural powers. His miraculous escape from such a large war-party, slaying ten braves and bearing away with him six scalps created superstitious wonder in that hideous horde.

Not only this, but they believed that he had been on foot when he gave the taunting yells and had sprung upon one of the mustangs of the slain, and as all these horses were fagged by the long race, they were forced to the conclusion that the Caddo had the power not only to banish the fatigue of the mustang, but also to instill into the animal strength, bottom and speed far beyond that which it had previously possessed.

Gradually those who had been in the rear during the race now joined the main party, until some fifty warriors sat their reeking mustangs, their serpent-like eyes fixed upon the point where Creeping Cat had last been seen.

Grunts of disappointment, surprise and rage burst from those who had not witnessed the concluding race or caught sight of the Caddo since the latter had sprung from his death-struck steed and dashed headlong into the timber that marked the course of the Rio Llano.

The horses of the Comanches, as has been said, were in a most jaded condition, the breath of the animals coming and going in a dry and rasping manner, and but little further could many of them run without falling to the earth.

But there is no mercy in the heart of a Comanche or an Apache, even to the steed that

has, it may be, borne him through many a fierce fight, or saved his life by speed when severely pressed.

A warrior of either of these tribes, and indeed of many others, will ride their beasts, lashing the animals in a terrible manner, and pricking their hams with their scalping-knives. Then, when a horse can go no further, the inhuman fiends will spring to the earth in fury and shoot hunting-arrows into the poor beast in such portions of the body as to cause the animal to die a lingering death from swollen and festering wounds, upon which the flies fasten.

It is a mercy in such cases when the "prairie loafer," or black or gray wolf, discovers one of these tortured animals, thus left to perish miserably on the trail, and finishes the work of death.

Many mustangs, thus treated by their cruel and inhuman red masters, are to be seen on the Indian trails of the great Southwest.

But, to return to the war-party.

As has been mentioned, all the braves sat their horses, gazing down the Llano timber-line.

Thus they remained for some moments, when suddenly a peculiar yell came from the outskirts of the savage horde toward the open plain, drawing the instant attention of all.

Ejaculations in low and guttural tones came from every throat; ejaculations of the utmost surprise, while a joyous and vengeful glitter might have been detected in the snake-like eyes of the entire party.

And a strange thing it was to see in that far frontier, a sight that caused strange impressions on those wild sons of the Llanos, and for the very reason that, once before during that day, they had discovered a like scene.

They had first perceived Creeping Cat, seated upon his horse, and both man and mustang silent and still as an equestrian statue, both gazing at them from a position in their front, on the bare, level, broad, and open prairie, far from any timber or elevation, and without even a stone, or tree, or bush, to break the broad vista.

They had given chase with the result detailed. Now, out upon the plain to the northeast, a quarter of a mile from them—on the open plain where nothing broke the view—was another horseman, also fronting; facing them as if studying their character and number.

Both horse and rider in this case also, were still and silent; the animal as black as ebony, and the man, even at the distance mentioned, easily distinguishable, by face and habiliments as a white man.

He held his hat in his hand, downward along his right leg.

All the war-party were more or less superstitiously impressed by this scene, so like the first; the discovery of which had proved the death of ten braves. Guttural grunts of wonder and amazement now ran the rounds of the war-party.

Had this strange horseman sprung from the earth, or had he dropped down from the skies?

Many forced themselves to believe that they had swept the vast plain, with keen gaze, not five minutes previous to the discovery of the mysterious rider, and that there was then neither horse nor man within view.

For several moments, all stared at the strange sight of a single white man, sitting as composedly, without the slightest indication of fear, or of flying before their warlike array.

It was exactly as the Caddo chief had done, before whirling, as they dashed after him.

To see a white man alone, at that distance from civilization or a military post, unless it were some skilled scout or mail-rider, whose steed could easily evade the ordinary Indian pony, was a strange sight.

That this horseman was a man who was unaccustomed to the border, was at once apparent to the red-men; for, had he been a scout, or ranger, he would not have allowed himself to be seen, but would have whirled, and galloped east, quartering in a southerly direction to the timber. This he would have done, and sought hiding, upon the first glimpse of them.

The position, bearing, and manner of this white man, was a taunting insult to the war-party, and incensed the chief, Rolling Thunder, to fury, and immediate action.

Selecting a half-dozen of the best-mounted braves, he ordered them to speed to the left of the horseman, and get beyond him; and a half-dozen more, to the right, thus partially surrounding him. This order was at once obeyed.

Those who had been selected, wishing to distinguish themselves within the view of Rolling Thunder, and the remainder of the war-party, started with great alacrity, on their mission.

Although the lone horseman must have understood the maneuver, and his danger, he made no movement; but, keeping a stiff rein, maintained the same motionless position.

Thus he remained, to the wonder and admiration of the red witnesses, until the half-dozen braves, to the east of him, were the same distance from the war-party that he was himself; they pressing their animals to gain his rear.

Then, he twit-bred his horse a half-turn, and the animal shot toward the warriors mentioned;

who, dumfounded at the reckless daring and unexpected dash of the lone equestrian down upon them, were, for the moment after they had halted, at once incapable of action, or of thought.

The warning yells, however, of their fellow-braves, aroused them; and half their number poised their long lances. The remainder of them drew their short bows, that a white man could not have bent two inches, and fitting arrows to the strings, stood ready to send them, in quick succession, on their errand of death.

As the reader has no doubt surmised, this lone rider was Herbert Howard, and he had been following the trail of the three wagons and ambulance of Black Bill; but, upon discovering the Comanches, had been rendered frantic by the thought, that perhaps Lulu Lindsay had fallen into the power of the red pirates of the plains.

A moment's reasoning, however, caused the young man to decide that this was improbable; for, from the labored gallop of their mustangs, he knew that they must have chased the lone Indian, of whom he had caught a glimpse, for many a mile, and had just failed to capture him.

He had been greatly puzzled, however, at the sight of reds pursuing a red.

But that which troubled Herbert most, was the fact that the red fiends might discover him; and then, by dashing after him, catch sight of the wagon trail, which was afar out on the plain, and quartering toward the timber of the Rio Llano, to strike the same a little above.

This caused our hero to gallop directly toward the river; the only move he could make, as he believed he had been seen by the Comanches.

The nearer he got to the timber, the less liable would the Indians be to observe the wagon ruts; and Herbert's object was to lead the war-party further down-stream, if possible, when they would be forced to encamp where their hunters and side scouts would not discover the camp of Black Bill, which, if they did, would seal the doom of poor Lulu.

He still hoped that all would yet be well with her, and his thirst for revenge upon her abductors grew stronger and stronger.

Woe be to those miscreants, when he and they should meet!

When he saw the two small parties of Comanches dash forward, to effect his capture, or death, Herbert could not retreat toward the plain, without crossing the wagon-trail; consequently he held his position, and when he realized that the Indians might gallop a sufficient distance beyond him, to notice the plain "sign," he shot toward them, as has been stated—this movement causing those in the rear to halt, and thus preventing the discovery of the wagon-trail, further out on the plain.

Herbert had trained Black Cloud to be guided by a word, or the pressure of his knee; and to halt, or dash forward at signal sounds. So, the noble horse now skimmed the plain, starting straight at the strange horsemen ahead, as his hoofs fairly flew through the grass and flowers.

Thus on, toward the paint-daubed demons, until within a hundred yards. Then Herbert jerked a revolver in each hand, the click of the locks sounding, as he threw the weapons up, ready for business.

At sixty yards, the deadly feathered shafts of the Comanches were more dangerous than a rifle or pistol-ball. Our hero had been told this; but, at about that distance, the sharp, continuous reports of his death-dealing "sixes" broke the silence of the prairie.

The strange, imposing charge of a single white man upon them, when some forty of their fellow-braves were near, so dumfounded the half-dozen warriors, that the war-whoop was forgotten.

Herbert took direct aim, each shot, at the braves, who were bending their bows; and five shots brought down three—their arrows flying wild as death called them.

With horrible howls, they threw up their arms in the air, dropped their weapons, and sunk to the ground, as their mustangs stampeded in fright.

By this time, he was right upon the braves, who poised their long steel-pointed lances, shooting as his noble black sped forward to close quarters.

A lance hissed past the young man's head, and another was part buried in the ground, in front of Black Cloud, as the brave who cast it fell dead upon the sward. But one Indian now remained alive, as the last chamber of our hero's revolver was emptied; and he was *minus* his lance, which had passed harmlessly by Herbert's head.

This brave quickly clutched at the bow at his back, and drew an arrow from his quiver; a most fatal mistake, for before the savage could fit the shaft to string, Black Cloud dashed alongside, and Herbert grasped the Comanche by the hair, with his left hand, and buried his bowie, to the hilt, in the painted breast.

The mustang of the Indian shot away, and the brave fell, with a dull and sickening thud, to the earth, while the air was filled with terrific whoops and outcries of frantic fury.

With these were mingled the dismal howls for the dead, and the pursuit-yell from Rolling Thunder.

Spellbound, the Comanches had sat upon their mustangs, almost paralyzed at this slaying, in a few moments' space, of six more of their fellow-warriors, and that by a lone white man.

Herbert looked hastily behind him, as he jerked his bowie from the breast of his last victim.

The whole war-party were now speeding toward him, with terrific and blood-curdling whoops.

He gave a peculiar whistle, and Black Cloud shot out over the plain, like a swallow, and down the Rio Llano, toward the point at which Creeping Cat had disappeared from view in the timber.

Herbert had drawn the war-party further from the camp of Black Bill, which he knew could not be far off.

Not only this, but he had prevented the small party of braves to the west of his recent position, from advancing north, over the plain, to his rear; which, had he not done, they would, without doubt, have discovered the wheel-ruts of the outlaws' wagons.

Lulu had been saved from the savages, but she was still in the clutches of her father's murderer!

CHAPTER XXV.

FALLING IN WITH FRIENDS.

"THAR, Ole Rock! He's layin' 'bout es easy es yer kin fix him. Ther Caddo hev lost a heap o' bleed, but he'll scrouge through O. K."

"Kinder gi'n him a wash-over, an' I'll skute, an' take a peep over ther perrarer, fer ther chief hev bin run by a passel o' Comanches, er I'll chaw bugs fer grub ontill nex' grass. Some o' ther hellyuns mought be clost arter him, an' lunge in on we-uns suddint like."

"Yer can't 'pend on Skip, when ther nag's bin a len'thy run o' periods without t'arin' up feed, when he does git inter wild bottom-rye; but ef hit warn't fer thet, Skip 'u'd smell 'em out afore ther red torturers 'rove, an' start his music. So long, pard!"

Thus spoke Single-Eye, as the latter and Old Rocky laid Creeping Cat upon a blanket, the speaker vanishing in the thickets, to ascertain if any Indians were in chase of the Caddo chief, in order to be prepared for them.

"Cuss my cats, an' dang my dorgs, Caddo! Ef yer doesn't look es though yer hed run ther gantlet," growled Old Rocky, great anger mingled with sympathy and deep concern.

"Ef I doesn't slash, an' hash, an' skin 'bout a dozen condemned Curmanch' torturers fer this, I hopes ter be stewed with yaller dorgs, an' fed ter Piute papposes! Whar in thunderation yer bin, an' how kim yer ter buck ag'in sich a hefty scatterin' o' red bellyuns? Fer I know thar was a heap on 'em, er ye'd hev tuck 'em in outen ther dew, er skuted without gittin' yer skin slashed. But I won't ax yer ter sling tongue yit, fer I knows yer feelin' p'ison bad."

"I sw'ar, I'm gittin' es bad fer gabbin' es ole Single-Eye. I'll gi'n yer a wash-off, an' then 'amine yer wounds. Yer looks bilious, sure."

Creeping Cat lay with eyes fixed upward upon the swaying mosses that draped the limbs of the trees. His eyes mirrored the agony that he suffered, and his weakness was shown plainly by their lack of luster; but no contortion of features, no groan, or writhing of limbs betrayed the torture of his many wounds. His lips were parched and cracked, and his breath came in short and rasping gasps, caused by the fever which was now upon him.

Old Rocky hastened to the creek with two canteens; but while the old scout was filling them with water, and cursing the Comanches most emphatically, Creeping Cat staggered through the undergrowth, and threw himself into the shallow, sand-bottom creek. There he lay submerged, his lips on a level with the surface.

"Wa-al, double up, an' dang me!" cried Old Rocky, in amazement, as he sprung erect, with something of apprehension in his gaze, when the Caddo staggered through the thicket.

"Perferate my palpatator with a pickled pepper, ef yer didn't make a cold streak run down me."

"Cuss me, ef yer didn't straighten up mighty suddint-like! Dog-gone me, ef yer ain't a screamer! Take a good soak, ole pard, an' I'll tear off some soft moss below water-line, an' swab yer wounds ter git ther dry bleed off. Durn my skin ef yer didn't make my pericardium, es Joe Booth calls it, draw up like a Injun paint-bag what's bin left ter cluss ter a camp-fire!"

"I'm hankerin' ter hev yer spit out ther bull biz, but I ain't goin' ter crowd yer inter slingin' gab jist yit. I doesn't exactly undercomstan' what's bin ther rumpus down ther Llano, fer me an' Single-Eye hain't friz our peepers onter any fresh 'sign' 'bove hyer. Ef thar's a big bunch o' reds jumped yer, they must ha' comed down country, keepin' cluss ter ther Col'rado, an' gi'n' Fort Mason ther cold go-by, 'count o' Burleson's boys."

"But my tongue's gut on a extry wobble. Howsmever, I'm fixin' yer up bunk."

While thus talking, the old scout had been suiting his actions to his words, having gathered soft moss, and with a touch as gentle as a woman's, had removed all blood from about the wounds of Creeping Cat. He then assisted him to his feet and to the camp, the Caddo, by his look and movements, betraying the fact that he had been much refreshed by the bath.

CASTING a large amount of dry dead-wood on the fire, Old Rocky spread a blanket near it, saying:

"Take a lay-down nigh the blaze, chief, an' dry ther loose drink off. I'll hev yer a stiff drink o' coffee in ther wag o' a big-horn's crupper-holder. Ole Single-Eye'll 'rove afore soon, an' hump hisself arter somethin' ter make yer easier."

"Dang my half-sister's black cat's kittens! Hyer I air, ole pard! How's ther Caddo? Condemn me, ef he ain't 'pearin' a heap more peart!"

"Jumpin' Jerusalem! Look out thar, ole Rock! Thar's a boss rattler!"

As the last words left the lips of Single-Eye, his blade shot flashing through the fire-light, as the ominous warning of the pest of the prairies sounded on the air.

Old Rocky made a flying bound to the opposite side of the camp-fire, but the Caddo chief gazed stoically into the flames, not deigning even to turn his head, although the warning rattle came from within three feet of his position.

As the knife of the scout pinned the head of a huge rattlesnake to the side of a hollow log, the serpent writhed and thrashed about its tail, repeatedly striking the shoulders of Creeping Cat.

Yet the chief turned not. He still sat, gazing into the flames, as if in deep meditation, and appearing totally unconscious of his surroundings.

A hollow log lay, with one end near the fire, and the heat had caused the snake, with was of large size, to crawl out; but the hasty movements of the old scout had caused the "rattler" to coil for the deadly spring. But Single-Eye was now, as he generally was, on time, and his bowie had impaled the venomous serpent through the head almost ere its warning had been given.

"Good fer you, ole pard," said Old Rocky. "Ther condemned squirmer war 'bout ter fall in love with my leg, er ther Caddo's shoulder; an' ef ther cussed p'ison-slinger hedn't lingered ter medertate 'tween red an' white meat, Le'd made ther rifle, I reckon."

"Blamed ef ther rattler didn't come t r see we-uns, jist when he war welcome!" exclaimed Single Eye.

"Ef he ain't a ole sockdolager, I'm ther boss pervicator o' ther plains. He's gut a leaf o' fat, longer'n yer two paws, each side o' his inards; an' ef thet ain't ther bestest 'intment fer ther chiefs wounds, I'm a Piute!"

"I'll split ther sarpiant, an' rub the Caddo down wi' ther fat; an' I reckon yer'd better mash up some prickly p'ar, ter bind over ther slashes. Thet'll heal 'em up better'n anythin' on this hyer ball o' dirt."

"Thet's whar y'e're right, pard," agreed Old Rocky, proceeding to the outskirts of the bottom-timber, to search for the "nopal," while Single-Eye removed the fat from the rattlesnake. This he held before the blaze for a moment, and then rubbed with it the form of the Caddo chief.

The eyes of the latter filled with gratitude at the kindness and attention of his white pards.

Half an hour afterward the wounds of the chief were carefully dressed with the jelly, made by the old scout from the prickly pears.

Old Rocky then produced a bottle of whisky, which he always carried for such an emergency, and administered a large dose to Creeping Cat.

This strengthened the chief, and he sat up on the blanket; and, soon after, began to eat like one who had been nearly famished.

"They can't make ther Caddo wilt inter his moggasons, without they digs his brains, an' bestest bleed mersheen out, skins his head, an' hashes him inter cat-fish bait!" asserted Single-Eye, with an admiring gaze at his red pard.

"Hit'll be a ormighty cold day, chuck full o' double-bar'l'd 'nother' when he sings his death-song."

"Dang my dorgs, an' cuss my cats!" said Old Rocky, who had just rubbed down the horse that had been ridden by the Caddo, and secured the animal near at hand, to wait for the beast to cool off before allowing it to drink and feed in the patch of wild-rye, with his own and that of Single-Eye.

"What's struck yer now, pard Rock?"

"I war thinkin' that yer'd better gi'n yer talker a rest, an' kinder lay low on ther gab, ter 'low ther chief ter scrouge in a word edge-ways, ef he's interlarded thet-a-ways."

"Hyer he comes in, jist a-b'ilin', on a wild stompede, clingin' ter a strange pag's neck, an' all bashed up, an' he hain't slung a word since he wilted off ther critter's back."

"Whar in thunderation air yer mustang,

Creepin' Cat! He war 'bout ez speedy an' long-winded a animile es ever tored grass. Whar'd yer git this hyer boss? Hit hain't been straddled by a Curmanch'—thet I'm gamblin' on—fer hit's gut a hefty 'mount o' meat onter hits bones."

"I tuck all thet in, fust off, Ole Rock; an' I've bin runnin' my talker ter keep from gittin' sick; fer yer hain't opened yer marrer bone sucker half a dozen times since we-uns lighted out, 'fore sun-up. I hed ter hev a sly conversache wi' Skip-Lively, now an' then, er I'd ha' fergut how ter spit out 'Nited States lingo. Gi'n ther chief some more whisk', ter loosen his tongue!"

"Dang my dorgs, ef I doesn't, fer I'm bu'st-in' wi' 'quis'tiveness, es Reckless Joe used ter say!"

Another drink was given to the Caddo, who had begun to manifest some interest in what was going on. After drinking the chief arose, and straightened himself, stretching his arms upward; although the movement must have caused him no little torture. Then he strode, with a firm step, repudiating pain, to where Old Rocky had thrown down his saddle, the two scouts staring blankly at him.

The saddle, which as the reader will remember, had been loaned the Caddo by Black Bill, was furnished with a pocket on each side of the blanket, and, from one of these, Creeping Cat drew the six reeking scalps of the Comanches that he had last slain, holding the trophies in the air with pride, and shooting out the war-cry of the tribe, in exultant intonation.

Then he threw the scalps at the feet of the scouts.

"Jumpin' Gee-boss-iphah!" exclaimed Single-Eye. "Ef ther Caddo hain't bin on hefty biz! He's bin an' corral'd a heap o' hair, ef he did git scarified—dog'd ef he hesn't!"

"Cuss my cats, an' dang my dorgs! Ef he ain't a reg'lar warin', screamin' terror!"

"Thet 'crap o' ha'r, what he's harvested, kinder p'int's ter some consider'ble ole he cut, an' slash, an' shute. Ther bellyuns 'll pick up his trail, an' folle, es long es ther critters kin shake a huff. They'll be chuck-full o' hyder-phobic!"

Creeping Cat strode back to his former position, and stood, with folded arms, again gazing into the blaze of the camp fire.

The scouts knew that, after his recent display of the trophies of his prowess, he would speak, and enlighten them in regard to his recent adventures; so they kept silent, awaiting the Caddo's time.

For a full minute, the chief stood thus. Then he stretched out his right arm, and pointed his fore-finger in a northeasterly direction, saying:

"Bad white men there. So many"—indicating twelve upon his fingers. "Got so many white wheel-lodges"—holding up three digits—"black wheel lodge"—extending one finger. "Got lily-face squaw in black wheel lodge. Hair like sun. She daughter of Great Spirit. Fall from stars."

"Bad white men steal Gold-hair. Creeping Cat is not fool. Got sharp eyes. Think heap when see lily-face squaw. She want get away from bad white men. Creeping Cat say Gold-hair be free as prairie bird, Creeping Cat's tongue not forked."

"Dang my dorgs, ef ther Caddo, hain't jumped somethin'!" burst out Old Rocky, in extreme astonishment; while Single-Eye's solitary optic expressed the same emotion.

"How 'bout ther ha'r? We 'uns 'll look arter ther leetle gal, yer kin jist bet."

"Comanche thick. Heap big war-party. Lash mustangs fast. Try catch Creeping Cat. Want torture. Creeping Cat gallop fer Llano river. Must hide in trees. Shoot so many braves"—indicating four by his fingers. "War-party shoot arrows in Creeping Cat's mustang. Kill, fall on plain. But timber no far off. Run in bushes. Go over river on trees."

"Run fast. Break into camp bad white men. Then see Gold-Hair. Comanche sound war-whoop. Bad white men heap scare. Creeping Cat say give mustang quick. Then lead Comanche down river. No see wheel lodges. No see white men camp."

"Creeping Cat want save Gold-hair scalp. No care bad white men. All bad. See in eye. See in face. Creeping Cat not fool. Get mustang; ride fast down river. Sourd war-whoop. Comanche hear. Come fast fer Caddo. No see white men camp. No get Gold-hair scalp."

"Comanche, so many"—indicating six, as before—"try stop Creeping Cat in bottom-timber. Big fight. Kill all. Scalp all. See!"—pointing to the gory trophies. "Heap big fight. Lassoes on Creeping Cat neck, on arms, all over. Cut quick. Fight quick. Comanche knives fly fast. Cut creeping Cat, but make horse run. Caddo chief heap weak, heap sick."

"Put arms around mustang neck. No see. No hear. No sing death-song. It is good. Find white brothers. Feel like warrior now. But heap bad when think of Gold-hair."

"Creeping Cat make long talk. Talk no good on war-path. Creeping Cat has spoken."

"Ye're a brick, Caddo! Dang'd ef yer ain't, an'—"

The chief had cast himself upon the blanket

that had been spread for him, but, an instant after, he interrupted Old Rocky by springing again to his feet, while a prolonged hiss issued from his lips, his arm being extended toward the plain, in the direction that he himself had dashed into the camp of the two scouts.

The three peculiar pards listened intently. The sound of a fast-galloping horse became distinctly audible, and each of them grasped his rifle and sprung behind a tree.

The next moment with tremendous bounds, crashing over and through the undergrowth and into the camp, dashed Herbert Howard on Black Cloud, the horse covered with foam and panting laboriously.

Herbert, who had but discovered the fire, which was in a hollow tree and had died, just as he nearly reached the camp, and too late to avoid the same, jerked his revolvers, and yelled, as Black Cloud came to a halt near the fire:

"If you are white men, show yourselves, and stand by a man run by Comanches!"

CHAPTER XXVI. THE REPULSE.

"We're white, clean through, stranger!" yelled Old Rocky, in reply to Herb's challenge, as the three pards started from their ambush. "We-uns air white, though one on us hez a red hide."

"Jump from yer critter, an' we'll stan' by yer es long es our lamps holds out ter burn. Come on, boyees! We must look alive, I reckon. How many o' ther cussed bellyuns air thar, stranger?"

By this time they had started through the undergrowth, toward the border of the timber.

"I shot several of them last evening, just after they had run a single wounded Indian down on the north side of the Rio Llano."

"An' thet wounded Injin air right 'longside o' yer. He war hashed up, some considerable, but he's game—chuck-full o' san' ontill ther last horn toots!"

Herbert had no time to even think, much less look toward the Indian near him, who had surprised our hero from being with white men; and, if he had, it was now too dark to distinguish his features.

Just then they reached the border of the bushes, to see what would have been a most appalling sight to one who had never before witnessed such a scene.

Speeding over the moonlit plain, their quirts hissing through the air, as they lashed their panting mustangs, was a full score of Comanche braves; their lance-points glittering in the silvery rays of the moon, their hair and scalp-decorations flying wild!

Their silence, as they rode, caused them to appear more unearthly and horrible.

With gaze bent upon the point where Herbert had disappeared, on the red fiends bounded.

Their mustangs, during the chase after the Caddo chief, had been pressed hard; but Herbert had only tantalized them, by making halt, and waiting until they came nearly within arrow-shot, before urging Black Cloud again on a wild run. This had been to draw them, as far as possible, from the point at which he believed Black Bill must have encamped with poor Lulu. But more had to be accomplished.

As he neared the timber of the creek, he felt the necessity of placing a longer distance between himself and his pursuers; and, when he unexpectedly bounded into the camp of the scouts, his first thought was, that he had led the Comanches into that of Black Bill.

Hence his extreme agitation, and instant yelling out of the words with which the last chapter closes.

Great was his relief at the welcome that met him.

He perceived that he had providentially "struck" a trio of invincibles, upon whom he could depend.

A glance into their faces proved the three, brave, daring, honest men—"white and square."

Herbert was almost beside himself with joy, and rushed with them into ambush against the Comanches.

"Cock yer long shooters, an' lay 'em 'side o' yer, easy ter grip!" ordered Old Rocky. "Then jark yer 'saxes,' an' git ready to bore red meat, 'bout es lively es yer kin pick yer triggers; but don't, nary one on yer, shute, ontill yer hears my yell."

"When we-uns kin see ther glint o' ther or'nary cusses' peepers, thet's time enough ter let 'em know we're hyer, an' ready ter start a lively ole he-circus, gatherin' in a crap o' ha'r."

"Caddo, keep yer breathe fer a h'ar-raisin' whoop. Hit'll make 'em too hyderphobic ter shoot straight, when they hears yer chin-music, an' knows yer 'scaped, an' air right side up, wi' care."

"Hyar ther bellyuns comes! 'Member what I spit out. Keep ez steady ez ther 'Chanted Rock!'"

It was terrible to witness that avalanche of wild, panting steeds, and wilder demons in the shape of men, as they now shot toward the timber; the bright moon smiling placidly down, revealing, in every detail, the advancing sav-

ages, to the quartette of crouching men—each clutching his revolver, and watching for the critical moment!

At length, but thirty paces intervened between the Comanches and the concealed Texans and their Indian pard; and, at that instant, a loud yell burst from the throat of Old Rocky, Single-Eye joining in, and the war-whoop of the Caddo ringing out tauntingly.

Then followed scenes and sounds that baffle description.

The reports of seven revolvers, all fired simultaneously, caused the Comanches to jerk jaw-strings instantly, thus making them better marks for the hail of hurtling bullets that tore through the vitals of the warriors who were in the lead.

War-whoops and death-yells now filled the air.

Appalled and demoralized by the sudden surprise, and the death and disaster that had come upon them, the Comanches presented a strange sight—a perfect whirlpool of madly plunging mustangs, painted breasts and faces, glittering eyes, and bows, lances, quirts and shields, tangled in fearful confusion.

Then began a rattling fusillade, each firing at will into the mad mass of savages, the yells and howls of whom were now torturing to the ear. Braves were now to be seen throwing their arms upward, as the bullets struck their breasts, and then falling over the hames of their frantic mustangs, to be crushed beneath the fast-flying hoofs.

Even the scouts, who so well knew the fiendish and merciless nature of the demons thus suddenly overcome by death; who had witnessed so many scenes of horrible massacres, where women and babes were mutilated beyond recognition—even they forgot, for the time, their oft-repeated oaths of vengeance, and lowered their revolvers, without attempting to reload.

Herbert Howard stood, spell-bound with horror, at the bellish sights and sounds.

Not so the Caddo chief, however.

Eight braves, probably none of them free from wounds, sped, with yells of superstitious terror down the creek, and along the border of the timber; and, as these started, Creeping Cat raised the war-cry of his tribe, sprung from the undergrowth, and raising his rifle, fired.

Another horrible death-yell sounded, as one of the fast-galloping survivors fell dead from his mustang.

From the midst of the slain could now be heard the low, monotonous death-songs of the wounded, who well knew that they were doomed to death—the war-cry of the terrible Caddo convincing them of this.

No sooner had Creeping Cat fired his rifle than he threw it to the earth, and drawing his huge scalping-knife, strode to the front. Here and there he went, his many wounds being forgotten, plunging his knife into the paint-daubed breasts of the wounded; his exultant war-song sounding strangely, broken in upon as it was by the death-howls of his victims.

Then reeking scalps one after another were torn from the heads of the slain, by the Caddo chief, the moon shining brightly upon the blood-reeking scene of the ambush, its silvery rays reflected in the soulless eyes of the slain, and the pools of gore.

"Come on, stranger; ther circus air over! Ther Caddo air 'bout ter skin beads, an' carve ther palpatators o' ther wounded, which, though hit's on ther p'ogramme with us giner'ly, I reckon yer doesn't keer ter gaze et. Come on ter camp!"

"Ye're es welcome es a rain-storm in a drowth, an' yer bes done a big thing fer Texas leadin' ther red cusses up so we-uns c'u'd bore 'em."

Thus spoke Old Rocky, as he preceded Herbert, going toward camp, with Single-Eye following.

"Jumpin' Jericho! didn't we everlastin'ly salerwate 'em?" put in the latter. "How many more o' ther red scum air thar back on ther Llano, stranger?"

"There were, I should say, fifty collected together when they started to run me. I shot six that blocked my way, and then the chief sent this party in the race after your red friend Creeping Cat."

"I must say that Caddo is a most wonderful man. He doesn't seem to mind his wounds, although when I saw him last he could not sit his horse. But, I must thank you, gentlemen, for your brave services in my behalf. I ought to beg your forgiveness for having led those red devils upon you; for, had you been asleep, you might have lost your lives."

Both scouts burst out laughing; Old Rocky returning:

"Now, stranger, none o' thet sorter gab. We-uns never sleeps ter count when thar's reds anywhar 'round." Does we, pard?"

"Stranger, I used ter hev a eye thet went back on me onc't in a while," said Single-Eye, "but I gouged hit out, leavin' my bestest peeper, which air ready fer biz night er day."

"But, what's yer handle, an' whar'd yer 'rove from? What started yer this-a-ways?"

"Gentlemen," said our hero, "my story is soon told. My name is Herbert Howard, and I

am on the trail of the most cowardly murderer and abductor that curses the State of Texas.

"His name is Bill Black, better known about Houston, Galveston, and the lower Trinity, as 'Black Bill.' He murdered a planter, Major Lindsay, on the Galveston and Houston boat, and then stole the major's daughter, who is now held captive by him somewhere in this vicinity."

"He has three wagons and an ambulance, and about a dozen desperate fugitives from justice with him. The worst of the gang is one known as 'D-vil Dick,' who shot a man on the 'Magnolia,' at the time that Major Lindsay was murdered."

"Black Bill also shot two gentlemen, who endeavored to arrest him, by springing into the trees that border the bayou. I was on the trail when the war-party put in an appearance, and I drew them after me, to prevent, if possible, their discovering the wagon-trail, and capturing the young lady, whom I have sworn to rescue from Black Bill; although she is in about as dangerous a position with the outlaws, as she would be with the Comanches."

"Now, that you know my object, I shall ask you to assist me in rescuing the poor girl; and I will pay you, as well as this Caddo chief, any price you may put upon your services. What do you say, my friends, to my proposition?"

"I would not ask this great favor, did I not fear that the much-wronged maiden may become the victim of the miscreant who murdered her only living parent; of whose death, she is as yet—thank God!—in blissful ignorance."

"Cuss my cats, an' dang my dorge, ef thar ain't bellishness goin' on 'mong civerlize, 'bout es bad es 'mong ther reds!" growled Old Rocky.

"Thet's ther worstest case I ever heerd on, an' we-uns 'll see you through dead sure an' sartain! We'll resky ther leetle gal, but yer mustn't say nothin' 'bout payin' our sort, er we'll throw up ther bull biz!"

"We 'uns ain't thet sorter humans!"

"Jumpin' Jerusalem!" exclaimed Single Eye; "ther outfit what yer buntin', stranger, must be ther one what Creepin' Cat run inter yesterday, when ther Curmanches were arter him."

"Ther gal what he calls Gold-ha'r must be ther 'identical female 'oman ye're arter!"

"Why, they gi'n ther Caddo, thet boss, ter skute down river on, an' draw ther reds 'way from ther camp. He said thar war a dozen bad white men, three waggins, an' a black waggin; an' hit 'war outen ther last thet ther lily-face squaw war gazin' et him."

"Hit's her, dead sure! Wait untill ther Caddo comes. I smell befty biz, Ole Rock! I'm eager ter carve bad white men; an' thet Black Bill orter stretch his wizen, on a lariat end."

"Mister Howard, squat right hyer! Ole Rock will 'tend ter yer critter, which air a slam-up anermile, an' I'll sling yer up some grub, lively."

Herbert was overcome with relief and gratitude; the first, at learning of Lulu from one who had seen her the previous day, the last at meeting such honest, brave, and self-sacrificing men on this wild frontier, and amid such dangers.

"We're Single-Eye an' Ole Rocky; I sergut ter interduc' we-uns," said the former, as he placed a quart cup of coffee on the coals.

Our hero was dumfounded.

Who was there, in Texas, who had not heard at least, of those celebrated border heroes?

Creeping Cat, at this moment, stalked into camp, his hands full of reeking scalps.

CHAPTER XXVII. ON THE WAR-PATH.

THE long-suffering maiden, as has been mentioned in a previous chapter, eventually fell into such a benumbed state of mind, that nothing, however frightful, in the least affected her. She was, in fact, on the borders of insanity; but, there were brief intervals, when, through her tortured brain, all the dread horrors of her perilous position rushed, in an agonizing whirlpool of thoughts, causing her tears to flow profusely. This was, probably, the reason why she did not go hopelessly insane; the flood of tears relieving her overtaxed brain.

It was during one of these periods, when her mind was in a more natural state than usual, that she was aroused from a fit of weeping, during which she lay prostrate upon her couch in the ambulance, by the reports of Creeping Cat's revolvers, and the far-sounding war-whoops of the Comanche braves.

The fair girl, now but the shadow of her former self, secretly unloosed the rear covering of the vehicle—her ghastly and horror-drawn face being pressed to the opening, and her tearful eyes sweeping the camp. Then she perceived that the outlaws were greatly frightened.

When Creeping Cat emerged suddenly from the bushes, Lulu realized, by his bearing, and the manly honesty depicted in his countenance, not only that he was no ordinary Indian, but that he was undoubtedly friendly to the whites; and when he spoke, she was assured of this fact.

The searching and significant glance of the Caddo chief, also caused the poor captive to decide that he understood her situation, and would be her friend. In the same way, she understood,

from the sweeping glance that he gave at the outlaws, her senses being now doubly acute, that he knew them to be of bad character.

When the chief galloped away, she, understanding his motives from his words, and the fact that Black Bill had given him a horse, prayed most fervently that he might escape the whooping savages, that now filled the bottom timber with bellish sounds; and were dashing, as she knew, quite near the camp.

Falling back upon her couch in the ambulance, poor Lulu strove to reason upon the appearance of the strange and friendly Indian.

She had heard her father speak of the several tribes, that had been of great service to the State, in acting as scouts, and guides, and trail-ers for the rangers, in their expeditions against the warlike and merciless Comanches and Apaches, who swooped down on the defenseless settlers of the border, leaving a trail of desolation and death on every hand; and she felt assured that this chief must be one, who had been thus engaged.

If he escaped, she had hopes that he would lead some party of rangers or scouts, to her rescue. At all events, she would cling to this.

Strange to say, she did not fear being captured by the whooping savages; Lulu, in her innocence, truly believing that she would not be in a more perilous position, as a captive in their hands, than as she was—in the power of Black Bill and his crimed-stained followers.

Death, she felt, would be a welcome release from her present sufferings.

She was not surprised when the animals were hurriedly "hitched up," and the wagons and ambulance were headed up the Rio Llano at speed, the outlaws riding on each side of the mules, and whipping the animals into a gallop.

The timber was soon left behind, and the "outfit" proceeded along the edge of the same, in the shadows.

As to Black Bill and Devil Dick, who held a hurried consultation after the departure of the Caddo chief, they felt secure, for the time being, from attack; and both came to the conclusion, after more calm thought on the subject, that the Comanches were not the only foes, by whom they were in danger of being attacked.

Upon the breast-plate of silver worn by the chief, was engraved sufficient proof of his connection with the rangers under Captain Edward Burleson; and probably, also, with wandering and independent scouting parties of bordermen.

Lulu had heard Black Bill read the name and legend on the crescent, aloud.

The Caddo was a man of keen perception and remarkable intelligence. This they both knew, by what little they had seen of him; and, during the conference, they decided that, should he escape, he would very probably join some party of scouts, and betray their presence on the Rio Llano.

They had seen the head of their captive projecting from the rear of the ambulance, when the Caddo was present; but they had not dared pay any attention to her, for fear of betraying, in some way, the fact that she was held captive by them.

Indeed, there had been little time to notice her, during the moments that danger and death hung by a hair over them; the Comanche whoops of war causing the blood to chill in their coward hearts.

Black Bill, before again starting his outfit, had called together his men, and inquired if any of them knew of a cave, or any position in the hills up-country, that was easy of defense.

A ruffianly and most murderous appearing member of the band stepped forward, and touched the brim of his dirty sombrero; squirting tobacco-juice, with an important air, far to his right.

This brute was known as "Jim-Jam" Jones, from the fact that when he got whisky to drink, he never "let up" until he was on the verge of insanity; indeed, on such occasions, he acted like a madman, having more than once "run a-muck," shooting down at one time, six Mexicans, in the streets of Eagle Pass.

"Well, Jim-Jams, what have you to offer?" asked Black Bill, with hasty voice and manner.

"Ef we strike fer Santa Anna's Peak, thar's a cave on top o' ther mounting thet'll fill ther bill, I reckon, Cap," replied "Jim-Jams."

"Yer'll hev ter run ther waggins an' critters some distance an' keep 'em in kiver, fer hit's a scattered live-oak country ter ther east frontin' ther cave. This hyer crowd c'd stan' off a bull comp'ny o' rangers fer a month o' Sundays ef we c'd git bar'ls o' water from a hole nigh ther Peak an' sot 'em in ther cave."

"We c'd tote the water up in buckets, I reckon. I doesn't use hit myself when I kin git whisk'; but hit's necessary fer cookin'."

"How far is Santa Anna's Peak from here?" inquired Bill, as a laugh ran around the circle of outlaws at the truthful confession of "Jim-Jams."

"Bout seventy-five mile es ther bee skutes ham with honey, an' a leetle more'n a hundred, I reckon, ther way we-uns'll hev ter wind."

"We'd better run on, day an' night, ef we kills ther anermiles, fer, dang my eyes ef I doesn't b'lieve thet Caddo'll blow on ther outfit ef he skins through from ther Curmanches!"

This was the first intimation that had reached Black Bill which indicated that any of his followers had formed the same opinion in regard to Creeping Cat as himself and Devil Dick.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Bill. "Why, ther red cuss'll run in on some o' ther scouts er rangers what he 'sociates with an' git 'em on our trail. He see'd ther gal an' he see'd through this hyer outfit. Thet red ain't no slouch, yer kin gamble heavy on that."

"But we-uns 'u'd ba' gone under ef we hedn't gi'n him a critter an' 'lowed him ter work his p'int's ter draw ther war-party 'way down river."

"I believe you're right, Jim. Devil Dick and myself came to the same conclusion."

"Light out, boys! We'll head up-country for Santa Anna's Peak, unload, run the wagons in the bush, and burn them. That's the programme. Hustle lively and don't spare the mules!"

This was the destination decided upon, and the start of the outlaw band made; but they were fated never to catch a glimpse of Santa Anna's Peak, or to enter the cavern, which had been occupied by many a horde of bandits, who, disguised as Indians, attacked the Government wagon-train camps at the "water-hole," not a quarter of a mile from the base of the peak, when the teamsters and escort, except a small guard, were peacefully sleeping.

Long before the morning dawned the seven Comanches who had escaped the massacre when ambushed by the scouts, Herbert and the Caddo, crossed the Rio Llano, and it so happened that these frantically furious braves, some of whom were wounded, broke through the bushes into the deserted camp of Black Bill. The slight glow of the nearly extinguished embers of the fire immediately attracted their attention, causing many a guttural ejaculation of amazement and exultation.

Perhaps the Avenging Angel guided them to the spot, causing them to recall the fact that the equipments of the horse of the Caddo chief, that had been shot under him in their first chase, yet remained on the animal.

This recollection caused them to leave their direct course, in their return to the main war-party, to secure them. Thus were they brought near the camping-place of the bandits, which they discovered upon fording the river, to pass down on the north side of the same to the camp of their fellow-braves.

From the embers, a fire was soon kindled with dry leaves and twigs, and then a fierce blaze, with masses of branches, from which torches were clutched. The red, fiend-like savages appeared doubly hideous from the weird light of the torches.

They now made their way half-bent around the "open," at times sinking to the sward to more closely examine the fresh "sign." Then they would arise with grunts of intense satisfaction, their snake-like eyes flashing from the near prospect of revenge, blood and scalps, to say nothing of plunder, and victims for the torture.

Fresh from a terrible defeat, the death-yells of their fellow-braves yet ringing in their ears, twenty-nine of the original war-party of sixty having been slain during the night and on the previous evening by the Caddo and the strange, lone white rider who had, in some mysterious manner, met and joined the two old scouts—for the Comanches had recognized the yells of these—to form an ambush which had proved so terribly disastrous.

All this not only infuriated the seven braves to frenzy, but made them so insanely eager for revenge that they came very near following the trail of the wagons and the ambulance, without going down the river to reveal the good news and divide the much-craved scalps and plunder, which they seemed so sure of gaining, and that soon.

The counsel of the leading brave against such a proceeding prevailed, however, and after tracing the plain trail through the timber, and ascertaining that the Texans had continued on up the Rio Llano, the hideous savages, most of them being bloodstained from their own wounds and from being bespattered with gore during the massacre, remounted their mustangs and hastened down the river.

Soon they reached the camp of the main war-party, whose howls of frantic rage at the death of so many braves, and vengeful yells at the information in regard to the wagon-train, now rent the midnight air.

The mustangs of the seven returning warriors were of no further use for the time being, as the animals had been run beyond all reason; but those of the braves that had been slain by the Caddo in the timber in the first race, and by Herb Howard on the plain, had been lassoed, and had been allowed quite a rest besides an abundance of grass, were ready.

There were now, therefore, more animals than were required; consequently Rolling Thunder ordered the last arrivals to dress their wounds, and the others to pack for the trail.

It was near daybreak, however, when the dreaded Comanche chief at the head of but half of his original war-party, thirty now in number—one of the seven, who had returned from the ambush, having sung his death-song, and joined his fathers before the start—galloped up the Rio Llano, to take up the trail of the outlaws.

Their faces had been fresh painted for the war-path, while a thirst for blood, revenge, and scalps contorted their features, that were hideous; unnaturally hideous and horrible now, when exhibiting such bellish passions.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FOR THE RIGHT.

No sooner had Creeping Cat cast the mass of scalps to the earth, upon his return to the camp of the scouts, from the point on the plain, where lay the gory victims of the successful ambush; than he cast himself down upon the blanket that had previously been spread for him, much of his strength, born of the liquor that he had drank, and the thirst for vengeance that ruled him, having left him.

After the excitement, and the war-spirit of his people had passed away, when he had torn the last scalp from the victims of the massacre, the Caddo became as weak as a child.

Old Rocky, perceiving his red pard's condition, hastened to tender his flask of whisky, saying:

"Take another snifter, Caddo! May I be dang'd an' double dang'd ef yer ain't a roarin', ragin' cyclone, when yer gits yer hyderphobic started; ef yer bees all slashed up!"

"This hyer stranger, what ther cusses war runnin'—Howard air his handle—wants ter know all 'bout ther waggin outfit, an' ther leetle gal, yer calls Gold-hair. He's arter her."

"She's bin stole, an' her ole dad killed, by ther boss o' ther waggin outfit; an' they're all bad white men, es yer war incarnated ter think—ormighty bad, Caddo. 'Take a drink!'"

Creeping Cat grasped the flask from the hand of the scout, and drank with avidity, shooting a piercing glance at Herbert.

Old Rocky continued:

"We're goin' on-ther war-path, arter ther bad white men, ter resky Gold-hair, Caddo, Mister Howard, Single-Eye, an' this hyer ole raw-hide ripper. Does yer think yer kin stan' ther rifle, an' glide 'long 'arly in ther mornin', ef we-uns dresses yer wounds, an' fixes yer up all right ag'in?"

"Jumpin' Jerusalem! of c'urse he'll levant with we-uns!" burst out Single-Eye, somewhat indignant at the question being raised.

"He'll go, ef me an' Skip-Lively hes ter tote him 'long ther trail. Yer see'd how suddint-like he gut ther stiffenin' outen him, when he knowed them cantankerous piruts o' ther perrars—what he hes ormighty good reason ter hash—war comin' on ther stompede, arter Mister Howard's hair."

"Wa-al, he'll brace up ag'in, come sun-up, 'speshly arter strikin' ther fresh waggin-trail, fer I knows by his lingo, an' ther look o' his peepers, when he spoked 'bout ther leetle gal, thet he's goin' knee-deep through bleed ef need-cassary ter resky her."

"Of c'urse, ther chief'll hump hissself with we-uns—I sh'd jist howl ef he didn't! I'll fix him up ag'in arter a bit."

The eyes of the Caddo again became bright, and once more he gazed into the blaze, as if he saw there the gold-crowned head of the fair captive.

Recalled by the words of Single-Eye, he arose to a sitting posture, saying in a low, deep, and impressive voice:

"When panther scratch bark to jump on fawn from tree, Creeping Cat he heap mad. Shoot panther. Stick knife in heart. Fawn run free on plain. Chief of bad white men, he more heap bad than panther. Bad eyes; bad face."

"Creeping Cat will follow his trail. He will go with his white brothers. Eagle-Eye, he that rides black horse, shall have Caddo chief to help get Gold-hair from bad white men."

"Eagle-Eye got good heart. Got good face. Got good eye. He heap brave war-rrior."

"Creeping Cat not fool. He know good. Know bad men when look in face. It is enough. When Caddo chief talk, mean what say. Creeping Cat has spoken."

"Jist 'bout what I s'posed yer'd sling out, Caddo," returned Old Rocky, with satisfaction; "though I didn't know whether yer'd hev vim enough ter skate out arter losin' sich a hefty 'mount o' bleed. An' I sw'ar yer bes bu'sted open some o' yer slashes in ther 'citement o' pluggin' ther Curmanches."

"Ye're bleedin' ag'in, an' bit won't do! Single-Eye, hunt up some cobwebs. Reckon thar's a few in ther ole log thar, whar the 'rattler' war pleasantly located."

"I'll hev some, es quick es a mule-ear'd rabbit kin jump," exclaimed Single-Eye, as he thrust the sticks, upon which he had been broiling meat into the earth, and removed the boiling coffee from the coals.

Shortly after, Creeping Cat was once more "fixed-up;" Herbert Howard, greatly fatigued

and tortured beyond expression in regard to Lulu Lindsay, who might now be within a few miles of him, gazing at the Caddo chief—still waiting for the latter to give him the particulars connected with the discovery of the camp of the outlaws, and their fair captive.

Old Rocky, however, invited our hero to accompany him, to change the horses from the wild rye, to the better grass on the border of the timber; as it would not benefit the animals to feed too long upon the rank bottom-grain. He then requested the young stranger to wait patiently for the Caddo to explain; which would be in a laconic manner, and probably not until after all had eaten—the scouts being ever ready to enjoy food, Indian-like, when opportunity presented.

After all had partaken of broiled buffalo-meat, which had been previously "jerked," and packed in their *malettos*—also corn-pone and coffee—pipes were produced; then the Caddo explained, in his peculiar way, what is already known in connection with his hasty inspection of the outlaws' camp.

A decoction of herbs, as hot as he could well drink, was then administered to him by Single-Eye, who wrapped the chief in a blanket, and the Indian was soon asleep.

The two scouts stood guard alternately, and Herbert was prevailed upon to compose his mind, and slumber; which he did, until awakened by the movements of his friends, as they set about preparing breakfast, at an early hour.

The Caddo also awoke, greatly refreshed, and all partook of the morning meal; fifteen minutes afterward being on their way toward the outlaw camp.

The camp of Rolling Thunder was much nearer that of the outlaws than was the bivouac of our friends; and, although the scouts and Herbert started earlier, their progress being slow and cautious on reaching the Llano river, the Comanches passed through the camp of Black Bill, and on along the trail, before our friends arrived. The slow progress of the scouts, through the woods, was made for the reason that they were not sure that the outlaws had followed the advice of Creeping Cat, and departed up the river.

The discovery that the camp was deserted was, however, soon made; and as our friends had forded the Rio Llano upon their horses, all rode into the camp, glancing searchingly over the sward.

It was now daybreak, and "sign" could be seen very plainly.

"Waugh!" burst from the lips of the Caddo chief, expressive of surprise and concern, while his black eyes flashed furiously.

"Cuss my cats, an' dang my dorgs!" growled Old Rocky, manifesting the same emotions more plainly.

"Jumpin' Jerusalem!" exclaimed Single-Eye; "ther dang'd greasy, painted, smoked sons o' Satan hev gut ahead of we-uns!"

Our hero, understanding the situation, groaned aloud. He could readily see that a large body of horsemen, the animals unshod, had nearly trampled out all the wheel-ruts in the soft sward.

"No time ter waste slingin' gab, er nosin' 'roun', boyees!" cried out Old Rocky. "Ther cussed Comanches air on ther trail, an' they're bilious, arter losin' so many braves an' scalps."

"They'll rip ther waggin outfit all ter flinders. Our only chances bees ter skute 'cross ther drink ag'in, an' jist everlastin'ly git up an' git West, keepin' ther Llano timber atween we-uns an' ther ba'r-t'arers. Ther's bloody biz ahead, an' plenty of hit, afore ther leetle gal can be rescued."

"Cuss me, ef things ain't gittin' mixed! Come on, boyees! Life er death fer Gold-ha'r may 'pend on a minute's time, er ther flicker of a hoss's huff!"

"Show yer bringin' up, Skip!" called out Single-Eye to his horse, as he ejected a squirt of tobacco-juice, viciously, down upon the hoof-prints of the Comanche mustangs.

"Pick up yer huffs lively. Ther's hefty biz ahead. Mister Howard, don't git bilious. We'll hev ther leetle gal, er bu'st up things gin'erly."

Whirling their horses, all being more or less nonplused by the unexpected discovery that the Comanches were on the trail of the outlaws, our friends dashed on the back track, through the timber, and then plunged into the river, fording it and passing the belt of trees on the south bank.

Then they drove spurs, galloping at headlong speed West, along the border of the timber; their object being to get ahead of the war-party, who were on the opposite side of the river and timber—which latter prevented the Texans from being discovered by the reds, and vice versa.

Had the Comanches known that the scouts, the lone rider, and the Caddo who had slain half of their original number, were just beyond the river, from them, the knowledge would have caused the war-party to give up following the wagons and seek revenge upon their more dreaded and detested foes; thus changing the

whole course of events, and probably preventing all attempts at rescuing Lulu Lindsay until too late.

This would have given Black Bill time to reach Santa Anna's Peak, where he and his band would be able to defy their pursuers.

The Indians were some distance in advance of the scouts and Herbert; a fact which our friends were well aware of. Consequently, they pressed their animals at terrific speed, keeping a sharp lookout on all sides and ahead. Herbert Howard was suffering great agony of mind at this undreamed-of change in affairs; realizing that his own and the chief's attempts to draw the war-party away from the outlaw camp had been fruitless.

It was not this alone that troubled him. Since he had seen these hostile Indians and heard their terrible whoops and howls, his blood had run cold; picturing, in his mind, his wronged and suffering darling in the power of such fiends.

Not a word passed the lips of these four determined rescuers; but on they sped, the Caddo chief holding a small round mirror in one hand while he daubed fresh war-paint upon his face and breast.

All this time a low monotonous chant rolled from out his throat, in a guttural tone, to which the scouts paid no attention, except, after a while, to utter the ejaculations, one to the other:

"Creepin' Cat's gittin' up his bilious!" "Hyderphobic's no name fer it. Heavy biz ahead—yer kin gamble on hit!"

"Oh, Heaven protect my darling!" half whispered Herbert in prayerful tones, pressing his brow, now burning and throbbing; but neglecting not to spur Black Cloud.

This was done but lightly, however; the horse being remarkably fresh and lively, considering the long race of the previous day.

And thus on, our friends sped, to the rescue of poor Lulu Lindsay!

CHAPTER XXIX.

MAN PROPOSES.

It was rough traveling with wagons along near the timber line as rank grass grew thick, and was matted together; but Black Bill feared to venture out upon the plain, lest he should be discovered by some Indian spy.

The course he was obliged to pursue caused the mules to eventually become so fatigued that they refused obstinately to break a walk; notwithstanding that the torturing "black-snakes" were used freely, and with cruel force.

Not only had the outlaws this disadvantage to contend with, but they were forced to follow the more sweeping bends of the Rio Llano for the same reason—the fear of discovery.

The sight of the Comanches had struck the band with terror; and, criminals though they were, they heartily wished themselves back in Houston. They began now to insist upon the utmost caution, grumbling to such an extent that Devil Dick advised Black Bill not to press them against their will, in any way, or they would "go back" on him, and leave him in the lurch.

The result was that Bill was captain only in name; his authority, as the ruffians grew more weary and discouraged, becoming less and less.

The symptoms of insubordination were only quelled by the distributing of a pint of whisky to each man, just in the nick of time to prevent the liquor being taken by force.

Devil Dick now became moody; in fact, morose and ugly. The whisky he had drunk, after abstaining for some time little past, caused him to look upon matters in a different light than previously. He well knew that Black Bill had a large sum of money in his possession, and he believed that his employer had killed and robbed Major Lindsay, on the "Magnolia."

This belief incensed him, for the reason that Bill had not seen fit to confide in him.

Devil Dick began to look ahead, and he was forced to decide that, from indications, the life to come, on that isolated border, hiding like bears in a cavern, would be anything but agreeable to one of his tastes and inclinations.

Brooding over this subject, and the money matter, Devil Dick finally decided that it would be a grand scheme for him to knock their leader on the head, rob him, take the ambulance and Lulu, and strike out toward Mexico; there setting up an establishment for himself.

The more Dick thought and pondered upon this subject, the firmer became his resolve to accomplish it; and the more whisky he poured down in his satisfaction and pleasure at having concocted such a plot, which promised to be the grand crowning act of his life.

To the remonstrance of Black Bill in regard to his drinking so freely at such a critical time, Dick replied with surliness bordering upon insolence; but Bill dared not resent this, and felt compelled to pass it by. He began now to think that he was in danger, not only from the Comanches; but that mutiny was liable to break out in his band, at any moment.

The ruffians might, from his heavy purchases and liberality, suppose that he had much more

money than he had led them to suppose he had, and murder him.

If they were really aware of the large amount in his possession, he well knew that they would not hesitate to kill him, that they might secure it.

A timber-lined creek, flowing from the north into the Rio Llano, had just been successfully forded; and Black Bill decided that the point of land, formed by the river and creek meeting, and which was overgrown with towering timber, would be a most favorable place to encamp. It was easy of defense, as two sides were guarded by deep waters.

There was but little undergrowth at this point, and soon the wagons were drawn in, securely hidden from view from the open land, and placed by the men in a line, after the mules had been unhitched; the poles of one wagon being run in under the body of another, thus forming a barrier across a portion of the point of land, and increasing the safety of the camp, in case of an attack.

The fires were then lighted, between the extreme point and the wagons; and the provisions and cooking utensils were placed near at hand.

As Black Bill proposed to encamp, Devil Dick seemed to cast off his surliness, and became quite social and lively. This relieved Bill very much. But Dick had an object in thus changing his mood, which will presently be seen.

"Bill," he remarked, as the wagons were being put in position, "I reckon we're not fur from Fort Mason, an' right in ther line o' ther rangers' trails up and down country."

"If sojers, or rangers, sh'd run in on us, we would be in a tight box, with ther gal ter blow on us. In my way o' thinkin', ther amblance order be run inter a bunch o' bushes, which 'd hide it; an' some distance from camp et that. Hit mought save our bacon."

"We-uns mought pretend ter be prospectin' fer a locate, favor'ble fer startin' a few ranches. What d'yer think o' ther idee?"

"It is a good one, Dick! Glad you thought of it, for it relieves my mind greatly. We have only the soldiers from the fort to fear, I fancy."

"I am confident that the Comanches shot the friendly Indian; and, as the war-party were on a raid down-country, they will, no doubt, keep on their course, and not discover our trail."

"Have the ambulance stowed away. There's a jug of liquor under the front-seat, but go light on it, Dick! I'll superintend things at this point for awhile, and then relieve you."

"All right, Cap!" returned Devil Dick.

The latter must have been a poor judge of distances, for he had the ambulance placed in an "open," at least one hundred and fifty yards from the wagon-camp. He made sure to have the vehicle turned about, the pole being toward the entrance of the "open," and the harness of the mules placed upon them, in good order. The plotter was bent on having every thing ready.

Poor Lulu had relapsed soon after the start, and now lay like one in a trance. Devil Dick gazed gloatingly in upon the fair captive without her being aware of the fact as he replenished his flask from the jug in the ambulance.

Soon the camp was a scene of confusion, all laughing and jesting as each endeavored to cook according to his own taste and ideas.

Black Bill, much worried and disgusted, repaired to the "open," where Devil Dick still sat, flask in hand. An abundance of food had been placed in the ambulance for Lulu, who, having partially recovered, resolved that she would eat, and thus strengthen herself, in case she was called upon to make unusual exertion, in the event of an attempt being made to rescue her.

"What in the dickens are we going to do, Dick?" inquired Black Bill, after dismissing the outlaw cook. "The whole crowd are drunk on a pint of whisky each, and they can be easily heard by any party that approaches our camp."

"I can't do anything with the ignorant roughs. What do you suggest?"

"Put a bullet plum inter ther brains of one er two o' them an' ther t'others 'll see yer means Liz an' they'll simmer down."

Thus advised Devil Dick, rather indifferently. At the same time the outlaw took a pull at his flask. Bill scowled indignantly, but went on:

"Dick, what do you say to you and I taking the ambulance to-night and lighting out? We'll 'strike out' for Mexico and enjoy life, if you say so. Texas is a dangerous place to linger in."

Dick glanced at his employer suspiciously, fearing that he had read his own thoughts. He saw at once, however, that Bill was free from any suspicion, so he replied, promptly:

"Satan burn me ef that wouldn't be a tip-top idee, Bill! I'm with yer until ther hot place freezes over. Yer can't count on ther crowd yer hez gut ef hit comes ter a fight."

"I reckon ter-night 'll be a good time ter lunge out wi' ther gal. Ther's grub an' whisk' enough in ther amblance ter last us thru'ga ter ther Grandee. Hit's a good circus, Bill!"

Dick again indulged and continued:

"Hit's lucky I gut sich a good locate fer ther amberlance, fer ther or'nary galoots can't see we-uns glide out. An' 'sides thet, they'll sleep es sound es death arter pourin' down sich a hefty mount o' bug-juice."

"You are right, Dick. Everything is favorable, as you say; but you haven't thought of the possibility of a stampede. The cussed reds might run the mules off. Three or four Indians could accomplish it, and then we'd be 'dished.'"

"Can't you have the ambulance-mules brought in under pretense of feeding them, and then secure them in a thicket without creating suspicion?"

"I reckon I kin make ther rifle. I'll fix it hunk, Bill!"

"How is the girl?"

"Purty good subje' fer a hosp'tal. I doesn't b'lieve she'll make ther run."

"That won't do, Dick! Can't you get her to drink some whisky? That would brace her up."

"Try bit yerself! Stick a bottle 'long side o' her, but don't ax her ter drink, fer she's es contrary es a Mex' mule. She'd jist es lives die es not, ther way she looks an' 'pears."

"Hit war a nasty job ter take her arter wip-in' out t'other et ther bayou, an' hit'll fotch bad luck onder we-uns."

Black Bill trembled like an aspen-leaf, and turned ghastly, as he demanded angrily:

"What do you mean? Whosaid that I wiped out—well, you know whot" glancing with a warning gesture into the ambulance.

"Nobuddy, Bill, 'ceptin' yerself; ye're lettin' hit out now, plain an' squar' es though yer spoke hit. I didn't know bit, but I does now."

"Ye're a thunderin' nice pard, Bill! Runnin' me fer what I'm wot' with a noosed lariat ready ter drap et any time over my head an' ch ke me off, an' you never slingin' out ther hull biz! Now I know yer split the palpertator o' ther man yer war arter an' gut a heap o' duckets from his carkiss!"

"You are right in every particular, Dick," said Bill, recovering himself, and speaking now with an assumed unconcern and boldness; "but you were drinking so heavy, I didn't think it prudent to confide in you. My proposition, for you and me to 'cut' the outfit was for the purpose of explaining everything, and dividing fair with you."

"We'll have a big hacienda in Mexico before a month rolls over our heads. And then you'll see if we don't lead a gay life."

"Put hit thar, pard!" said Dick, extending his hand with evident satisfaction, relief, and pleasure. "Ye're more squar' than I tuck yer ter be. Thet's all hunk. We'll make ther rifle."

Black Bill could not have used any words that would have impressed Devil Dick more favorably. Yet, for all that, Dick registered a mental oath that there should be no division of the spoils; that Black Bill should never see the Rio Grande, but that he should die suddenly and by violence, and his effects, including the fair captive in the ambulance, be confiscated by himself—Devil Dick.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ATTACK AND THE ESCAPE.

THE sun sunk; a huge round sphere of blood-red hue, its lower disk for a time seeming to rest upon the horizon line, as if reluctant to leave the beauties of nature, upon which its burning gaze had been fastened during the day.

At length old Sol vanished, but left his farewell fiery smile upon the western heavens, shooting up and blending with the blue—a half-circle of crimson, that, at the zenith, was of a milder hue, like the blush on a maiden's cheek.

The full, silvery moon, as if relieved by the retirement of the king of day, rolled serenely in the east, high up from the horizon, along its sheeny pathway, shooting its silvery shafts through the huge branches of the bottom-timber of the Rio Llano, kissing alike without fear or favor the cheeks of half-drunken outlaws, of paint-daubed Comanches, of brave and daring scouts, of the Caddo chief, of Herbert Howard, and last; though far from least, the pallid, terror-stricken features of poor Lulu Lindsay!

Our heroine sat, with lariat about her delicate waist, the opposite end being secured to the ambulance-wheel. She had paced back and forth over the sward of the "open" until wearied out; her hands clasped before her, but hanging, as did her fair head, listlessly downward, her wealth of golden hair nearly veiling from view her angelic features.

Little did poor Lulu dream that the one man of all men, and whom she loved better than life itself—she feeling that she would willingly lie down and die could she but once again feel his arms clasped about her, and gaze into his honest, manly, true and brave features—little did Lulu dream that Herb Howard was now crouching in the thickets just across the river from the outlaw camp, with two celebrated scouts and the noted Caddo chief near him, all ready to sacrifice their lives to rescue her from the dreadful fate that hung over her.

Little did the outlaws or their leader dream

that a score or more of blood-craving, murder-mad Comanches crouched, in all their hideousness, in the creek timber on the opposite side of the stream, their paint-daubed features and flashing, snaky eyes showing exultation and an insane desire for revenge, for scalps and victims for the torture. Nor could they have imagined that these feather-bedizened demons in human shape were now leading a frantic thorn-tortured mustang, that madly struggled to escape, through the woods that bordered the creek further up the stream to the north, aiming to reach the vicinity of the herd of mules and staked horses of the outlaws that were grazing upon the plain.

Soon the border of the undergrowth was reached, and the skin of the mustang that had been killed upon the previous evening at the camp, down the river—the same having been dried, as much as was possible, in the hot sun during the trip on the trail—was attached quickly to the tail of the animal.

Then, the half-dozen warriors, with terrific yells, let loose the mustang; the beast, with frantic snorts of terror and pain, shooting out from the screen of bush and branch, directly toward its kind—the herd of the outlaws!

At the same moment, the braves, with a series of far-sounding whoops and yells, also sprung upon their beasts, and over the plain, with arrows fitted to bow-strings; bounding in the rear of the fast-flying mustangs, now frightened to mad fury by the rattling dry hide of the horse, that had been secured to its tail, some six feet from its heels.

The head of every mule and horse, some fifty animals, was instantly jerked upward from the sod; the grass hanging from their jaws, and their eyes suddenly filled with fright.

Then, as the tortured mustang, with the strange flying object at its tail, dashed into the edge of the herd, every mule and horse, with snorts of terror, sprung madly over the plain, and up the Rio Llano, at terrific speed; dashing in a wild stampede, from the strange dread beast that flew after them, and the hideous yells of the Comanches.

At the first yell, the outlaws who guarded the herd, four in number, ran as though the very fiends were after them—as indeed they were—thinking not of defense: the sights and sounds, the on-bounding, yelling braves so frightful, appalling them, and rendering them incapable of judgment or action in the way of defense.

Straight for the camp they pointed, but they never reached their comrades; for, deadly steel-pointed shafts at short range, whirled, glinting in the moonlight, and pierced their backs and limbs.

Two of them, with awful shrieks, fell dead; the remaining two being severely wounded. These now turned and shot their rifles at the braves, who were directly in their rear. One Comanche fell forward, face downward, in the prairie grass and flowers, the death-howl bursting in horrible intonation from his lips. This caused a louder yell of vengeful exultation from his comrades, as they clutched and tore the arms from the hands of the two wounded outlaws, and then dragged them quickly into the bottom-timber.

Afar up the Rio Llano in a wild stampede went the herd of Black Bill, the outlaw.

When the first yell of the stampede echoed through the arches of the timber beneath which was the camp of the outlaws, every man darted from whatever position he occupied, and stood erect, their brutal, liquor-inflamed faces becoming as pale as death as each gazed in a dazed and terrified manner at his neighbor and then around upon all his comrades in crime.

Black Bill and Devil Dick were at the ambulance, consequently the alarmed outlaws had no one to command them.

The series of yells and whoops that immediately succeeded the first alarming, most horrible and unnatural yell, increased the terror of the outlaws, and they stood for a moment as if paralyzed. All eyes then turned toward the point whence the sounds proceeded; but they could not see through the thick screen of undergrowth that bordered the bottom-timber of the creek.

The shots that had been fired by the herders, and the sound of two hundred hoofs flying, in frantic fright, over the plain, explaining but too plainly the nature of the alarm. Had they gazed in their rear, the outlaws would have beheld a sight that would have congealed the blood in their veins with horror; for, swimming over the creek, with bows and arrows upheld in one hand above the surface, was a score of feather bedecked, painted Comanches; their snake-like eyes fixed, with most vengeful glare of triumph, upon their intended victims, of whom they felt so secure.

And, as the outlaws partially recovered from their stupor, and sprung for their rifles, which leaned against the tree-trunks, a hurtling volley of arrows laid one-half of their number writhing on the leafy carpet of the wood—the deadly, torturing shafts piercing their vitals.

Then came, in all its horrible intensity, the exultant war-whoop from every fiendish throat; as the red demons bounded to secure the survi-

vors, some of whom were wounded and helpless.

Not an outlaw escaped, either in the main camp, or on the plain; those in the camp being quickly bound, hand and foot, and cast roughly to the ground among their dead comrades.

A simultaneous yell of victory and rejoicing rung with terrific force through the camp, echoing up and down the timber of the Llano river.

Then might have been heard guttural ejaculations of surprise and rage, springing from the warriors here and there, as they shot glances of baffled fury around the bottom-timber.

The red demons began to realize that they had been partly foiled in their object.

The ambulance, which probably contained the greater part of the valuables, was not to be seen.

At once the braves darted about the bottom, where the wagons had entered the timber, and soon found the trail of the ambulance. Then, running along the same, half bent, they followed it up; while others began searching the wagons, laying hold of the bottles of whisky that lay by the tree-trunks, and gulping down the "fire-water" with intense satisfaction.

The stampede soon came in with their two captives, and the reeking scalps of the other two herders, waving them over their heads.

This gained them a welcome of loud whoops.

All the living outlaws, except Black Bill and Devil Dick—most of them wounded—were now bound to trees, in a line, in the camp.

Their faces were ghastly as death, and they were trembling in every limb, an awful dread being mirrored in their starting eyes.

When the red trailers reached the "open," in which the ambulance had been drawn, as described in a previous chapter, the little camp was deserted; but the keen-eared warriors caught the sound of crashing bushes in the direction of the plain, and rushed, with a terrific whoop, headlong in the chase.

Black Bill had instantly realized that all was lost, and that life depended upon escaping in the ambulance as soon as he heard the first yells of the stampede.

Devil Dick was of the same opinion.

Both the ruffians turned deadly pale, and rushed for the mules, which, as they had planned, Dick had separated from the herd, and secreted in a thicket near the little camp, the two partners in iniquity intending to "skip" the camp during the night, as soon as the main party became quiet.

Bill and Dick made lively work hitching up the animals—the attack on the main camp being so near them, hastening their movements.

In a very short time they were leading the mules slowly toward the plain, the only avenue now of escape, their course being through tangled undergrowth, rendering keen calculation necessary to select a passage between the huge tree-trunks.

While thus urging the mules through the undergrowth, Black Bill, upon turning to take a look backward into the ambulance to make sure that his fair captive was not climbing over the front seat to escape—Lulu having been left unbound since the time of her having relapsed into a semi-comatose state—while thus gazing, Bill caught sight of a flaunting feather above the bushes in the rear of the vehicle, and he sprung back upon the ambulance, drawing his revolver, and yelling:

"Jump, Dick! Jump for life, and whip up the team. The red devils are upon us!"

As he thus shrieked, he let fly every bullet in his revolver, and grasping its mate, again commenced firing wildly.

Devil Dick sprung upon the step on the opposite side of the vehicle, and imitated the example of his employer, the whoops of war and rage, and the howls of death proving that the shots had done some execution.

The firing and the yells caused the mules to plunge on in frantic haste, the animals soon bounding free from the undergrowth, and out over the plain. Black Bill and Devil Dick uttered loud yells in their great relief and triumph.

Dick then clutched the "ribbons," and his "black snake" hissed through the air, making the hair fly, and leaving huge welts wherever it struck the galloping, snorting, and terrified beasts.

Bill quickly reloaded his revolvers, as well as Dick's. He then glanced backward once more into the ambulance, to ascertain how his fair captive had been affected by the fearful whoops, and the firing of their pistols.

"Ye gods!"

This ejaculation burst from the lips of Black Bill, as he perceived that the rear covering of the vehicle had been unbuttoned, and was now flapping free in the wind created by their speed.

The miscreant sprung back into the rear of the ambulance. Then he yelled out, in his frantic rage and fury:

"Satan burn me forever, if the girl is not gone! Dick, I tell you, Lulu Lindsay has escaped, or the red devils have dragged her from the ambulance."

"Here is the luck turned dead against us,

with a vengeance! We'll lose the game—I feel it, I know it!

"But, hang me, if I don't hurt somebody yet! Turn the blasted mules into the bottom again! I'll have the girl once more, or die attempting it!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

COMING HOME TO ROOST.

THE scouts, with the Caddo chief and Herbert, arrived in the vicinity of the outlaws' camp, at nearly the same time as did the Comanches.

All secreted their animals in a dense thicket, upon observing the smoke of the camp-fires; indeed, they could hear the loud and boisterous laughter and conversation of the brutal followers of Black Bill, now under the influence of whisky.

This was soon after Bill had ordered a halt, and our friends were forced to be exceedingly cautious, and keep in hiding; for, fortunately for their own safety and object, they discovered the Indians on the opposite side of the river, and near its confluence with the creek, soon after their arrival.

Although before sunset, they all climbed trees near the river-bank, and inspected the camp of the outlaws, and its surroundings; but they could see nothing of what they most sought—the ambulance.

This not only puzzled them greatly, but caused them great concern and anxiety.

Eventually, as both Black Bill and Devil Dick were discovered, by Creeping Cat, to be absent, they began to feel deeper apprehension and anxiety. Herbert became almost unreasonable in his demands for an advance over the river, before the darkness should set in.

It had been only by much argument, and firm insisting upon the great danger of crossing the river, that the scouts and Creeping Cat had prevented the young man from setting out by himself, in search of the ambulance and Lulu.

"I tells yer, Mister Howard," remonstrated Old Rocky, "thet hit's plum dang foolishness ter think o' glidin' over ther drink. Ef we sh'd make sich a break, hit 'd ruinat ther hull biz; an' like es not, be ther cause o' ther leetle gal bein' murdered, outen pure devilishness."

"Ef thet Black Bill c'd put his knife inter ther ole dad, an' then steal ther darter, he's hellish enough ter kill ther gal, rather than hev yer git her away from him. Ef yer'll wait patiently, ther cussed reds 'll do up ther heftiest part o' ther biz, an' then we-uns 'll glide, an' rake ther board!"

"Hit won't be long arter sun-down, afore yer'll see one o' ther biggest circuses yer ever dreamed about, an' with hefty music in along, free gratis. I think I undercomstan'ther hull pesky 'rangement."

"Ther dog-goned cussed cut-throats are pourin' bug-juice, an' ther boss cuss, Black Bill, air afraid they'll disturb ther leetle gal; so he's hed ther amblance run funder up river, hev'n' a private camp ter hisself."

"What d'yer think, Single Eye? Ain't Old Rocky 'bout kerrect, pard?"

"Thet's 'bout ther cuss's p'ogramme, I reckon," agreed his brother scout. "Hit 'pears reasonable thet-a-way; an' I move we glides up ther river, arter hit gits a leetle darkish, an' vestergates things."

"I bankers ter tie a lariat 'roun' thet Black Bill's neck an' ther or'nary cut-throat; Devil Dick's too; fer, since I've bin ruminatin', I'm sart'in thet I hes heard o' some o' his hellish doin's, San Antone-way. He's ther wo'st pill in ther box."

"Es yer says, Ole Rock, ther reds 'll crawl in on 'em, an' corral ther hull lay-out; an', while they're a-kerwhoopin', we-uns must find ther amblance, an' resky ther leetle gal, scoopin' in ther two hellvuns fer ter stretch hemp."

"Gentlemen," put in Herbert, who had been much depressed and anguished by the enforced delay, feeling that he must now be very near the tortured object of his search, whose condition and danger he pictured as most terrible—"gentlemen," he said, "I claim the miscreant, Black Bill, myself!"

"I have sworn a solemn oath—it was when I looked upon the murdered Major Lindsay, on the 'Magnolia,' that I would revenge his death."

"And when later the daughter was abducted by the same inhuman dastard, I vowed that I would trail him on and on, if it took a lifetime, and that he should die by my hand."

"The lovely and innocent maiden, whose father Black Bill killed in a cowardly manner—this Lulu Lindsay the fiend has stolen and tortured beyond endurance, carrying her with him hundreds of miles. I tell you, my friends, I dare not think of it! I love her better than I do my life, and she loves me. That is all. But it is enough!"

"Cuss my cats, an' dang my dorgs, ef yer sha'n't skin ther or'nary no-count bellyun alive, an' I'll hold him!" asserted Old Rocky, with much emotion, while Single-Eye stepped forward, grasping the hand of our hero with a sympathetic grip, saying:

"By ther roarin', ragin' Jehosiphath! Yer

shill toast ther pesky skunk by a slow fire, and ole Single-Eye 'll fotch ther dead-wood!"

Then the Caddo chief strode forward, taking Herbert's hand and pressing it to his painted breast, as he said, in an impressive voice:

"Creeping Cat, friend, brother of Eagle-Eye. Gold-hair shall be Eagle-Eye's squaw. Black Bill, he die at torture-stake. A Caddo chief has spoken."

For what seemed a long time our friends lay in the thicket, making a repast of barbecued meat and cold corn-pone; until, finally, the sun sunk and the silvery moon arose.

All sat silent for something like an hour longer, when they sprung to their feet, as the first far-sounding yell of the stampede broke on the still twilight air.

"Ther circus hev started!" cried out Old Rocky. "Come on, boyees! Jump yer critters, an' glide arter this hyer ole raw-hide ripper!"

"Thank God, the torturing suspense is over!" burst with deep meaning from Herbert, as he vaulted like a flash upon Black Cloud.

All proceeded for some distance up the river. They then forded it, leaving their horses, while the terrific whoops, and yells, and sounds, of savage war caused them to dash toward the scene of conflict.

Most providentially, they were guided by the revolver shots of Black Bill and Devil Dick directly toward the ambulance, as the mules were plunging with the vehicle through the undergrowth, a half-dozen Comanche braves being in hot pursuit.

Two of these were shot dead in their tracks by the outlaw leader, although the reds were hidden from view by the dense thickets through which the vehicle was being dragged rapidly forward.

Then occurred a most strange event, which was not observed, however, by our friends, who could merely get a glimpse of the top of the ambulance, it disappearing immediately.

One Indian had been cunning enough to shield himself from the flying bullets by keeping directly in the rear of the ambulance, and, perhaps, no savage engaged in severe fight was ever so dumfounded as was this Comanche brave. For suddenly the rear flap of the vehicle was thrust upward and Lulu Lindsay sprung out, running directly toward the red-man and clasping her white arms about his painted neck!

Thus she stood, gazing back in dread and terror toward the ambulance, the bushes flying back to a natural position as the vehicle passed on, and thus screening the maiden from the view of Black Bill and Devil Dick when they glanced behind them.

Had the moon rolled from the skies and fallen at his feet the Indian would not, probably, have been more astonished, as the golden-haired girl claimed his protection—she, in her half-insane state, having decided that her danger could not be increased by being in the power of savages, who were such by nature.

The other five braves who dashed up to join their comrade, were not, however, so strongly impressed. They believed that he had captured the white squaw, and a loud yell shot from their throats, but the next moment, like avenging gods, the two scouts, with Herbert Howard and the Caddo chief, darted from the dense undergrowth, with bowies in hand!

Then followed a terrible scene.

Herbert, with a strength born of frenzy at the sight of the fearfully changed visage of his lost darling, thus held in the grasp of a war-painted savage, with one mad bound landed by her side and clasped his arms about her waist. At the same time up went his terrible bowie, gleaming in the moonlight, and then down, cleaving through the flesh and bone from shoulder to thigh the Comanche who had clutched Lulu in his arms.

The savage threw up his hands, and, with a horrible death-yell, fell at the feet of his slayer.

The vengeful Caddo dispatched two of the Comanches before the latter had recovered from their astonishment and superstitious horror at again beholding Creeping Cat, who had slain so many of their braves, and at such a distance from there on the previous day, and when they had believed him dead, as, when last seen by them, he had been clinging to the neck of his horse, his trail bespattered with blood!

Horrible death-yells now sounded. The sickening sound of steel was heard, thrusting home through flesh and bone, and blood was spurting through the bars of silvery moonlight and over the bushes, which crashed as the Comanche braves fell to rise no more—their last war-whoops having sounded.

"Run fer yer life, Howard! Run wi' ther leetle gal ter ther nags, es quick es ther good Lord'll let yer! Ther condemned scum'll be hyer, es thick es ticks on a mule's neck afore soon. Run! We'll foller, an' p'fect yer!"

Thus yelled Old Rocky.

Silently, and without leaving more "sign" than could be avoided, the scouts and the Caddo followed Herbert. The latter carried Lulu in his arms, she having fainted at the very moment of her rescue.

Torturing anguish, joy, and relief were battling in the breast of our hero, as, with his soul

in his eyes, he gazed into the face of his darling and then rushed onward, tearing through thickets and toward the horses.

Soon, fearful whoops sounded from the scene of the recent conflict; and yells that caused the Caddo to halt and turn about.

The taunting war-cry of his tribe would have burst from his throat had not Old Rocky rushed to his side and mentioned Gold-hair.

The chief had been prevailed upon by the two scouts to refrain from sounding his war-cry, as they did not wish the Comanches to know of their presence. Old Rocky well knew that their hatred for the Caddo would cause the Comanches to become furious and give trouble; perhaps jeopardize the life of the rescued girl, did they find out that they had suffered further loss from the detested Creeping Cat.

They had also requested the chief not to take any scalps for the same reason, and lucky it was so, for the Comanches were now greatly puzzled, and forced to think that quite a number of the outlaws had been with the ambulance, and that they had fallen upon and slain the braves. They were now excited and furious, not being able to discover the trail of our friends.

Ten minutes afterward, all were proceeding through the heavy timber, up the river; Herbert still clasping the unconscious Lulu in his arms, and she having more the appearance of a corpse than a living being.

The eyes of our hero were moist, and his lips were quivering as he frequently gazed into her face and thought of the sufferings she must have endured.

The Caddo left the vicinity of the Comanche camp with reluctance, and the scouts being suspicious of his intentions, requested him to ride in advance. Not more than two miles were traversed when the chief jerked his horse to haunches, raising his hand in the air as a cautionary signal.

The scouts rode softly to his side.

They could hear two men—white men, it was evident—in angry conversation.

Creeping Cat pointed to his right over the bushes; and, to the astonishment of both, they saw the top of the ambulance.

Old Rocky beckoned to Herbert; and, as the latter urged his horse to the side of the scout, he said to him, in a low tone:

"Give me ther leetle gal, fer thar's ther amblance; an' ther cuss, Black Bill, what yer banker ter carve, air jist through ther bushes!"

The face of our hero filled with pent-up fury, but he tenderly passed Lulu into the arms of Old Rocky, who held her gingerly.

Drawing his bowie-knife, Herbert drove spurs; and, at that very moment, the report of a pistol sounded from near the ambulance. This was followed by a horrible shriek of deathly agony.

The next moment, Black Cloud shot through the intervening bushes into a small "open," followed close after by Single-Eye and the Caddo chief.

There stood the ambulance, the mules being secured to trees on the margin of the "open," and, in the middle of the same, standing over the prostrate, gasping, and dying form of Devil Dick, was Black Bill!

Yes, there, at last, was Black Bill, the miscreant, murderer, and dastardly assassin of Major Lindsay!

CHAPTER XXXII.

END OF THE OUTLAWS.

As Herbert Howard dashed into the "open," where stood Black Bill over his prostrate confederate in crime, Bill turned quickly, terror the most abject shown in glance and feature; for he believed the Comanches were upon him.

He did not recognize Herbert, for he had never been acquainted with him, although the two had frequently passed each other in the streets of Houston and Galveston; and he felt relieved, at once, in his mind, as he began to concoct a tale that would relieve him from his position.

This was the plea of self-defense, which would be a plausible one, as Devil Dick still clutched his bowie in the death grip.

However, the face of Black Bill became more ghastly, and he trembled in every limb, as the Caddo chief shot through the undergrowth, followed by Single-Eye and Old Rocky; the latter bearing the senseless form of Lulu Lindsay.

Then did Black Bill become hopeless and despairing, for he knew that his time had come.

The expression of the features of the newcomers, proved that they were without mercy.

Then the wretch became desperate, and started, with a loud yell, toward the thickets; but the lasso of Creeping Cat bisected through the air, and encircling the dastard, pinned his arms to his side, and jerked him to the earth, with a great shock.

Herbert sprung from Black Cloud, and stood before the miscreant, as the latter arose.

"Your trail of crime is at an end, Black Bill," said our hero, in a cold, firm voice.

"An avenger has overtaken you, who has, in your case, no mercy. Did you suppose that you could plunge a knife into the heart of the father,

and then steal the daughter from her heretofore happy home, and not be brought to punishment?

"Did you imagine that you could shoot down, in cold blood, those who strove to arrest you for your cowardly crime, and justice not overtake you?"

"I had sworn to slay you with my own hand, but it would be pollution to come in contact with such a dastard; degrading to myself, to stoop to a conflict in which I should place myself on an equality with such a cowardly assassin."

"Black Bill, you have dared to lay your vile hands, in violence, upon the daughter, when the blood of the father was fresh on your knife-blade; and now, savage and merciless hands shall be chosen, to mete out the inevitable vengeance which must overwhelm such as you!"

"Insulted, scorned and outraged justice demands your life; and has decreed that, in dying, you shall suffer a portion of the agony which you have inflicted upon your innocent victims. You shall poison the air no more with your vile breath!"

"No longer shall you pollute this beautiful earth with your serpent trail!"

"Gentlemen"—turning to the scouts and the Caddo, who were greatly impressed by the young man's words and manner—"I, who have suffered more than tongue can tell, through the crimes of this miscreant, claim the right to condemn him; the coward, the murderer, the would-be destroyer of virtue and innocence—a crime far worse than murder!"

"I condemn him to be floated down the river, where he will fall into the clutches of the savages—the Comanches, who, pitiless though they are, cannot be compared with him for villainy, for they have been without his training and advantages."

"I ask you all to look upon that deeply-wronged and suffering girl; to think upon the agony and anguish of mind that she has suffered since she has been in the power of the dastard who murdered her father. Look upon her and say if the sentence is unjust!"

"Cuss my cats, an' dang my dorgs!" He uttered before he stepped into the devil's locate, and then jerked back and uttered "ag'in!"

Thus spoke Old Rocky, controlling himself with a herculean effort, from springing upon the now trembling miscreant.

"Jumpin' Jerusalem! Mister Howard, ef yer doesn't carry out yer vardict lively, I'll carve ther cuss inter cat-fish bait; fer I air goin' plum wild with bilious hyderphobic!"

Creeping Cat gave an outcry of exultation and approval when the others had spoken, saying in his peculiar manner:

"Good, heap good! Let Black Bill sing death-song at torture stake."

Bill fell upon his knees in the most abject terror, trembling, and endeavoring to plead for mercy; but his attempted words were but gasps. The wretch was now only a most revolting and disgusting spectacle of cowardice.

But little time was left to the assassin, for ready hands brought two logs of dead-wood, dry as tinder, after which, Black Bill's hands were bound fast behind him. The logs were placed in the river parallel with each other, and near together; and then the trembling and pallid wretch was placed in an upright position between them, they being secured to his arms, near the shoulders.

The next moment, with a shriek of fear and horror, the wretch was launched into the middle of the stream, and floated down the current, still howling in his terror; not reflecting that this would insure his discovery by the redskins.

Our friends immediately crossed the stream, Single-Eye volunteering to drive the ambulance further up the river, where he knew there was a favorable place to cross, as the vehicle was necessary for the comfort of poor Lulu on the long journey back to the Rio Trinity.

All proceeded down the river to a point immediately opposite the Comanche camp—arriving there before Black Bill reached that position.

The Indians rushed to the river, when they heard the piercing shrieks; and, as Bill floated opposite the camp, the warriors, with yells of triumph, rushed into the water, and drew the wretch ashore. Black Bill's horror and dread were now such that he could not utter a sound.

And well he might be, at the horrible sight before him, and the fearful shrieks that rung through the Comanche camp. Indeed, our friends were nearly paralyzed at the sight.

High up to the limbs of the trees, over the clear space in which the camp was situated, were knotted the ends of long buffalo-hide lariats, and to the lower ends of these ropes, dangled the outlaws who had been captured—the greater number of them wounded and the clothing torn from their bodies.

A rope was run through the ankle-muscles of the right leg of each captive, and then knotted tightly. Thus, head downward, hung the howling wretches; their arms free and waving, beat-

ing the air in their agony, at times drawing themselves upward and clutching the torturing ropes.

Soon, however, they would fall back in weakness and agony.

The outlaws were kept swinging to and fro, by the whooping horde of paint-daubed braves, who encircled them as they hung, using their long lances to push their victims, the points penetrating the naked flesh of the sufferers, and causing them to bleed profusely.

But this was nothing to the torture that they suffered from another source; for beneath them were huge fires, the forked flames darting upward within six feet of the victims, the heat most intense, and slowly roasting the wretches whose scalps had been torn from their heads previous to their being thus suspended.

It was a scene from which one would shrink within one's self, and grow faint with sickening horror.

The savages, mad with revenge, danced with glee, in spasmodic hops—half-bent at times, and then rising erect, to shoot out their yells of exultation.

Then they would circle in a hellish dance around their shrieking victims, prodding them with their steel-pointed lances; and causing to not only swing back and forth, but to whirl and twist with great velocity.

Upon the arrival of Black Bill, two of his captors quickly climbed a tree on the border of the camp, each with the end of a long lariat in his hand. Reaching a large limb that overhung the fires and the swaying outlaws, the two braves held the dangling rope, while their comrades below stripped the clothing from the form of Black Bill, who now hung limp with terror in the hands of his red captors.

A knife was run through beneath the muscles and bone of his ankle, this causing the miserable wretch to utter a scream that drowned even the exultant whoops of the fiends incarnate.

The end of the lariat was run through the gash, and secured. Then, up into the air, whirling and swaying, Black Bill was jerked; the braves in the tree, climbing along the limb, and making fast the lariat in the same, over the fires.

Black Bill had joined his comrades in crime, to shriek out with them his last breath in agonizing torture; his spirit, with theirs, to leave its corrupt tenement and fly—God knows whither!

The Rio Llano bottom-timber, at the camp of the Comanches, was now fearful both to see and hear, such were the hideous sights and sounds therein.

But such a scene could not last long.

The torture was too terrible. The fires were too fierce. And but a short time had elapsed, when the blood-reeking, half-roasted forms of Black Bill and those who had been captured of his outlaw band, were hanging limp and lifeless, without a twitch of nerve or muscle.

Herbert Howard had taken Lulu Lindsay from Old Rocky as soon as they had secured Black Bill to the logs; and when our friends reached a position from which they could view the horrible scene in the Comanche camp, themselves unseen, all eyes were fixed upon the swaying, tortured wretches.

Single-Eye, also, soon brought the ambulance through, between tree-trunks and thickets, in time to witness the vengeance of the Comanches upon their white captives for the loss of half their war-party.

Had the Indians known that those who had slain their fellow-braves were witnesses of the torture scene from just over the river, they would have rushed *en masse* through the waters, frantic with a thirst for revenge and blood; but the fires blinded their eyes, and even had this not been so, the undergrowth screened the other party from view.

When the outlaws were dead, Lulu was placed on her old couch in the ambulance, Herbert bathing her fair brow with water, and pouring spirits down her throat. The poor suffering maiden revived, to be transported into the seventh heaven of delight, to be weak and speechless, with the joy and relief that overwhelmed her upon discovering that she was free, and that it was Herbert Howard who held her, clasped to his manly breast.

The scouts and the Caddo proceeded on in the direction of Fort Mason, Old Rocky driving the mules; and before morning, the whole party arrived at the station, where Lulu received the most tender care and sympathy from the wives of the officers, as well as medical treatment from the post surgeon.

Herbert remained to comfort and cheer her, while Single-Eye, Old Rocky, and the Caddo chief accompanied and guided a scouting-party of the noted Burleson's Rangers to the camp of the Comanches.

The Indians had, however, departed in haste, having discovered the body of Devil Dick, and the trail of the scouts and Creeping Cat.

Rolling Thunder well knew that these invincible enemies would not have left his trail except to guide a large force to annihilate his already greatly reduced war-party.

The Indian mustangs had, however, been run

to such an extent that the Rangers soon overtook the remnant of the Comanche war-party.

Nearly all of them were slain, but Rolling Thunder escaped, to lead larger war-parties later on down upon the border settlers, leaving a smoking trail of desolation and blood wherever he went.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"MERRY AS A MARRIAGE BELL."

KIND reader, our tale is nearly told.

Again we will return to Bayou Plantation some three months after our friend had set out from Fort Mason, when Lulu Lindsay had sufficiently recovered to begin the journey homeward.

The old scouts and the Caddo accompanied Herbert and Lulu to San Antonio, promising that they would visit them in three months' time at the Rio Trinity, although it was, as Old Rocky expressed it, "A leetle too fur inter civilize fer a ole rawhide ripper ter keer ter skute."

At the time mentioned the mansion and gardens presented an animated scene, richly attired ladies and gentlemen in numbers promenading the veranda and serpentine paths of the grounds.

It was, in fact, the wedding day of Lulu and Herbert. But a few remarks are necessary before we proceed further on this subject.

The poor girl was not informed by Herbert of the sad death of her father until they had arrived at Houston, and then in such a manner as not to shock her feelings or mind to an extent, which might have been experienced had the fearful news been told by another.

As a matter of course Lulu was filled with the most poignant grief, but which we have neither the time nor space to attempt to describe.

Eventually she became reconciled to her loss, and even happy in the presence and love of the one who had, on no fewer than three occasions, saved her life.

Herbert much to his surprise, found secreted, among other papers in a box in the ambulance, sixty thousand dollars. The letters and papers, which he discovered, proved that the intention of Black Bill had been to ruin Major Lindsay, by getting the latter intoxicated, and then inveigling him into a game of cards.

A letter was also found, in the pocket of Devil Dick's coat, which was picked up in the ambulance; which was the epistle that had been written him by Black Bill, at Galveston. This gave the outlines of the plot that has been mentioned, and gave directions to Dick, in regard to keeping an eye on Bayou Plantation; at which place he was directed to remain, waiting the arrival of his employer, when Lulu Lindsay was to be abducted.

As Herbert knew that Black Bill had no means of procuring money—that, indeed, the worthless vagabond was continually "dead broke"—he was positive that the plot had been carried out; that the unfortunate major had lost the money, in a game with Black Bill, when under the influence of liquor.

That this money, the sixty thousand dollars, by right belonged to Lulu, he had not the slightest doubt; and he at once delivered it to her, reasoning her into accepting it, with the explanation we have given.

As was before stated, Bayou Plantation was alive with guests; our friends, Old Rocky, Single-Eye and Creeping Cat, being conspicuous in new buckskins. They were the center of all eyes, from its being known that they had taken such a prominent part in the rescue of Lulu Lindsay.

Aunt Huld, the cook, was the happiest old creature on earth at the return of her young mistress, and all the slaves on the plantation, including little Pomp, danced and sung with glee.

Especially happy and proud was Aunt Huld upon the wedding-day; for she (and, in fact, every servant on the estate), loved and honored "Mars' Herb."

Blanco, the pony, was rejoiced beyond measure to be fed again from the hand of his pretty mistress, and he ran free in the bottom-timber all the wedding day.

The guests were from far and wide, and tables were spread under the magnolias, groaning under the load of luxuries.

The ceremony was performed on the veranda by a clergyman from Houston, and all agreed that a more pleasing sight they had never witnessed. The scouts and Creeping Cat, in their peculiar but honest manner, offered their warmest congratulations to the happy pair.

The uncle of Lulu had hastened to Bayou Plantation, upon receipt of Herbert's letter, and not only attended to the burial of his brother, but remained, in great anxiety, until the return of the young man with the fair object of his search.

He had been very favorably impressed by our hero's conduct, and he was not in the least surprised when Herbert asked of him the hand of his niece in marriage—he being now her nearest relative.

Prompt assent was given, and the uncle asserted that he was proud to know that his

lovely niece had so fortunately been closed by one so worthy, brave and noble.

The scouts and the Caddo returned to their far frontier, from which they could not long remain absent; and the reader may hear of them again in the near future, as their lives were one continuous whirl of adventure, privations and dangers, such as but few men are blessed with nerve and strength to brave or undergo.

Herbert's father settled a large amount upon him; the old gentleman being proud of his boy, as his praises were being sung in all quarters.

The bones of Dolph Drake were found soon after the fire; and as one rib was completely severed, in the region of the heart, and the blade of a knife, with the iron portion of the handle, were found near the bones, there was no doubt, in the minds of Galveston people, in regard to the fascinating gambler's having been murdered.

An inquest was held, and a volunteer witness came forward; who stated that, upon the night of the murder, he had suffered from a severe headache, and, as he lived in a dwelling that backed upon the rear of Dolph Drake's house, he had observed something which might give a clue to the perpetrator of the crime.

While resting his head against the Venetian blinds, to cool his brow, he had seen a man whom he knew, from walk, gestures, and tone of voice, to be Black Bill, leading Major Lindsay, who staggered as if intoxicated, into the rear door that led to the rooms of Dolph Drake.

Some time later, when he again repaired to the window, he had seen, by the aid of a street lamp, Major Lindsay emerge from the house of the gambler, and disappear up the street. Somewhat later, Black Bill came running out, and then but a short time elapsed before the building was in a blaze. From this he was led to believe that Black Bill had murdered Drake, and then set fire to the house to conceal the crime.

This evidence caused a verdict to be given agreeably to the belief of the witness, thus fastening another crime upon Black Bill, and one which he had not committed.

The assassination of the major, and the shooting down of his pursuers as they sprung from the steamer "Magnolia," went far toward the rendering of the verdict of murder in the case of Dolph Drake also. And had not Black Bill gone to his room in the Island City Hotel, in a most demoralized condition, pouring brandy down his throat constantly, he would have known that there was another conflagration of which it is not necessary for us to speak.

When the crowd of young men, who, it will be remembered, were searching in the lumber-yard for Black Bill, after their return from the dance, when Major Lindsay and Bill escaped being discovered by them—when these young men were thus searching, one of them wandered to the most western portion of the piles of lumber, and caught a view of Black Bill as Jake, the Jew broker, opened his door to admit him at that early hour.

This young man hastened to inform his comrades, but they had gone quite a distance, and were seated, drinking; consequently it was some time before the man who had seen Bill could induce them to accompany him to the house of old Jake, and get Bill to join them.

When they did, they keeping silent on the way, they found that Bill had departed. When they knocked, the Jew, thinking that his customer had returned, on some important business connected with the very recent profitable transaction, at once opened the door, without practicing his usual caution.

The crowd of young men rushed into the hovel, with much boisterous laughter, demanding Black Bill; and, heedless of Jake's angry assertions that Bill was not in the house, they began a thorough search of the premises.

Jake became infuriated, and drew a pistol, as they tore away the covering of his safe, shooting one of the young men through the arm.

This so angered the wounded youth, that he stabbed the old Jew to the heart.

Sobered, startled, and horror-stricken, at seeing Jake fall dead, they quickly set fire to the rags, and other inflammable material, rushed from the hut, and returned to the lumber-yard.

There they secreted themselves, and watched the second conflagration, on that eventful night in Galveston.

The wretched dwelling of Jake, the Jew, was burned to the ground; and the papers that gave him the power to wrest nearly all the earthly possessions of Major Lindsay, from his orphaned daughter were destroyed, with the Jew's body.

The verdict of the public—no inquest being considered necessary—was, that Jake had perished in the flames accidentally kindled by himself; perhaps by having fallen asleep, and overturned his lamp. Little interest, or sympathy, was created by his terrible death; and to us, who know the power that he held, it seems that it was fated, in the spirit of justice, to be his doom—that the papers, gained by fraud, and from which foul murder sprung, were to be destroyed.

Thus, after all, Lulu Lindsay was not defrauded of her just rights, through the miscreant who had murdered her father, torn her from home, and love, and hope, and condemned her to a worse than death.

And, at last, after all the anguish, agony, and dread horrors have been passed, let us think of Herbert and Lulu Howard, as they were; happy, indeed most happy, in each other's love—living at Bayou Plantation, now doubled in tillage land and slaves by our hero, and rendered by his artistic taste, assisted by his wife's suggestions, more paradisiacal than it was described at the opening of our tale.

Herbert and Lulu often galloped to the spot, where they first met in danger most deadly, and there stood, with arms about each other, gazing over the bank into the deep waters, into which Blanco had fallen, with his angelic rider; and from which she had been saved by him, who was destined to be the man of all men on earth to her.

The panther-skin was dressed by Pomp, and was hung, in a conspicuous place, in the hall of the mansion; and, about it, were arranged the arms of Herbert, which he had carried on that long trail, to the rescue of his darling.

And thus, gentle reader, in peace, security and love, we will leave those whom we have followed through scenes of danger at home, and terrible trials abroad, trusting, and believing that the happiness, by which they are now blessed, may be enjoyed to the end of life, by "EAGLE-EYE" and "GOLD-HAIR."

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